

MASCULINITY AND THE MALE BODY FROM THE WORLD OF THE  
ANCIENTS TO THE WORLD WIDE WEB

by

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A THESIS

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This thesis examines ideals of masculinity and the male body in ancient Greek art and literature, and in contemporary advertising and mass-media publications. Persistent themes concerning what is ideally masculine affect the way men perceive their bodies, and ultimately, themselves. I argue that such ideals are visible in the way men present

their bodies and personal attributes to others in online public forums using photos, text, and other media. In order to discover how some men view their bodies and to observe the way in which they present them to others, this thesis will analyze existing photos and written texts posted on an online public website, MySpace.com. The large and diverse membership of MySpace.com makes it an excellent place to observe ideals of masculinity and the male body operating in individual men at the vernacular level.

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For my son, who inspires me to love my body every day, and for my mother, whose infinite patience and support made my education possible.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of Purpose

A large body of scholarship exists concerning the treatment of the female body in various media in different historical periods. Contemporary circulation methods of mass-media and advertising make images of the “ideal” female body more prevalent than ever before. Scholars such as Jean Kilbourne (1995) argue that the increase in these types of media directly correlates with a surge in negative self-image and body dysmorphia in women, yet few have focused on how this type of media affects men as well.

Commenting on the lack of such scholarship her book *Naked Barbies, Warrior Joes, & Other Visible Forms of Gender*, Jeannie Banks Thomas writes,

I find the pervasive association of aggression with masculinity particularly disturbing, as is the lack of a significant folk critique of this linkage. Although there is folk criticism of Barbie’s unrealistic ‘body beautiful,’ I did not see a parallel folk critique of the association between G.I. Joe and the ‘body violent.’ (Thomas 2003, 189)

The purpose of this project is to examine how men internalize ideals of masculinity and the male body by analyzing a collection of images of the male body as it appears in a variety of historical and cultural contexts and mediums. The analysis will begin with representations of the male body in ancient Greco-Roman art and literature, and end with contemporary advertising and mass media, and the online community of MySpace.com.

In addition to images of the male figure itself, I analyze representations and ideals of the male body in discussions of sexuality, aesthetic preference, and the concept of “masculinity” as it has been perceived throughout Classical and contemporary literature. The second chapter is an analysis of the male form in ancient Greek art as it appears in a variety of mediums such as sculpture, carving, and painting on amphorae and drinking vessels. Robert F. Sutton argues that vase painting was “comparable in relative scale to contemporary mass-market media.” (Sutton 1992, 4) If he is correct in this assertion, given the role contemporary mass media plays in constructing and disseminating ideal representations of the male and female form, the representations on Attic vases are of key importance when formulating theories concerning the aesthetic ideals of ancient Athens. Widely disseminated images such as those on Attic vases impact the identities of individuals who receive them by shaping perceptions of both their own bodies and the bodies of others, and are folkloric in that they are a part of visual culture.

Bodily forms and aesthetic expressions are learned rather than innate. They are products of culture, and individuals learn these forms and expressions through their interactions with others as well as through the circulation of images. These forms and expressions are visible in art and material culture, but they are used to create individual identities as well, and can be observed through both formal and informal channels. Individuals use clothing, adornments, and the body itself to communicate aspects of their identities. Sight makes the transmission of these aspects of identity almost instantaneous, a fact reflected in the importance many individuals place upon their appearance. This thesis examines both depictions of fictional and idealized bodies in ancient Greek art and

contemporary mass-media and the way “real” individuals depict themselves on the internet. Though the definitions of masculinity in ancient Greek culture differ in many ways from contemporary American culture, the aim of this thesis is to illuminate the themes that have endured historically and converge with those of the present, and how they are represented in the bodily forms and aesthetic expressions of American men.

The primary literature discussed in Chapter II includes Platonic dialogues concerning the nature of love, sexuality, and desire. Scholarship examined concerns the treatment of pornographic subjects in erotic vase painting and literature, as well as the appropriate way men of ancient Greece were expected to display their masculinity and sexuality. Appropriate conduct for males involved in sexual relationships in ancient Greece is illustrated by the speech *Lysias III*, written for the defense of the Greek citizen Simon. Other secondary sources in Chapter II include critical analyses from scholars of related fields including ancient literature and art history. Images in Chapter II consist of a wide range of red-figure and black-figure techniques on pottery, as well as stone friezes from the Parthenon. Images depict scenes of male homoeroticism, nudes, and heterosexual intercourse. The third chapter includes an analysis of the male figure in contemporary American mass-media and advertising, photographic and textual self-representations of men on MySpace.com, as well as answers to a brief survey described in the Fieldwork and Methodology section.

The title of Chapter III incorporates the term “vernacular” to convey the bodily forms and aesthetic expressions of the “folk.” That is, the way individuals who are not artists or master sculptors construct their identities through these forms and expressions in everyday

life rather than idealized works of art. The emphasis on featuring images of the ideal male and female body in the mass-media and advertising provides an accessible context for examining modern perspectives of masculinity and the male body. Several studies such as those cited in Chapter III have been aimed at measuring the effects of advertising on body image and self-perception. The target group of such studies has been largely female, particularly with regard to eating disorders and cosmetic surgery. Images circulated through advertising and mass media publications affect the way individuals perceive their bodies, and ultimately, themselves. Because men are also targets of advertising and the mass media, the way they view and present their bodies can be affected as well. How does the mass-media shape men's perceptions of themselves and their bodies? Do men present their bodies in a manner consistent with the way advertisers feature the male body? In order to discover how some contemporary men view their bodies and to observe the way in which they present them to others, this study will analyze existing photos and written texts posted on an online public website, MySpace.com. Members of MySpace.com create personalized web pages with .html code. Pages include a photo index where members can upload and display photos of themselves or other media of their choosing, as well as written text describing goals, interests, beliefs, and achievements.

The internet has had a significant impact on the way individuals communicate with one another. The ease with which individuals can network and find others with similar interests is arguably unparalleled by any other breakthrough in information and communication technology. The opportunity for multi-media communication increases

with the continued improvement of web cams, digital microphones, and software programs that allow users to essentially convert their computers into telephones with both audio and visual. Communication on the internet, though once limited solely to creative use of text alone, has now expanded into an environment teeming with opportunities for individuals to establish relationships with others regardless of their physical locations. Websites like MySpace provide a means for individuals to more easily navigate the vast amount of information on the web. MySpace is a large and diverse community that provides its members with the opportunity to find other individuals with similar interests and identities. MySpace is therefore an excellent place to examine themes and conventions of both dominant and subcultural groups.

I joined MySpace in May of 2005. A friend who had her own account showed me the site, and I was fascinated by her use of images and other media to customize her page. When I learned that MySpace afforded her the opportunity to maintain contact with old friends from her home town as well as individuals she had never met in person but were her “friends” through MySpace, I opened an account immediately. MySpace and other similar websites provide a context for community, uniting individuals from different regions of the world and myriad different backgrounds together through technological means. Nancy K. Baym discusses the concept of traditionalization occurring among members of websites, stating, “Traditionalization occurs through a group’s communicative practice (which need be neither face-to-face nor in a shared space).” The members of MySpace comprise a folk group who share common factors and a collective identity as described by Alan Dundes (Oring 1986, 1). Though the space shared among

MySpace members is a vast and abstract location known as “cyberspace,” conventions and traditionalized ways of speaking such as those noted in the online community Baym studied are certainly present. Abbreviations for common patterns of “cyber speech” are used in both the text on members’ pages and in private correspondence. Common abbreviations include “TTYL (talk to you later),” “LOL (laughing out loud),” “IMHO (in my humble opinion),” “BTW (by the way),” and several others.

As was the case in the website Baym examined, MySpace users commonly employ symbols known as “emoticons.” Emoticons are used to convey a number of emotions such as happy, sad, playful, and sarcastic. Emoticons can be an actual image or conveyed by the use of punctuation marks. The following examples illustrate some common methods of punctuation emoticons:

<b>Example 1, “Happy face”</b>	<b>Example 2, “Sad Face”</b>	<b>Example 3, “Wide Smile”</b>
: )	: (	: D

MySpace affords the opportunity for members to express their identities based on visual media rather than textual communication alone. According to Baym, most scholars of computer-mediated communication argue that the lack of visual and auditory information in computer-mediated talk reduces most conversational cues to status, appearance identity, and gender, therefore reducing communicators to anonymity. The combined media of MySpace allows for a highly individualized expression of personality not found in other websites which rely solely on textual posting (Baym 1999, 167). Members form their identities (and identify one another) by posting photos of themselves, selecting graphics and color schemes, and choosing music from any number of genres and artists to



accompany the layout of their pages, or even sound bites containing the member's own voice in addition to descriptive text. As a community existing within a broader cultural context that utilizes the material available to it via cultural position, the content of MySpace pages is reflective of the norms, values, and preferences of its members.

Conclusions can therefore be made from similar patterns and the expressions of its members regarding popular cultural preferences.

When I opened my own MySpace account, I indicated I was a single female interested in "dating" and "friends." Within a week, I received emails from male users both in my area and in distant locations throughout the US. I was very surprised at the almost instant recognition by other MySpace members. Although I knew my profile would be available for all users to view when I opened my account, I did not anticipate that I would be "visible" in a sea of millions of members. I underestimated the ease with which MySpace's "Browse" feature allows members to search for and locate other members of the same or opposite sex interested in dating, along with the added convenience of evaluating the photos of members, which automatically appear in search results. Some of the emails I received were amiable and polite, often notes simply stating that the user found my profile interesting and wanted to say hello. However, some emails I received were overtly sexual in nature from users requesting to chat on MySpace's "Instant Messenger" feature for the purpose of engaging in "cybersex." While investigating the pages and photos of male members who contacted me through email, I began to notice a number of similarities in both text and images. I began running my own searches and recognized that the similarities between male members' pages held much in

common with the way men are featured in much contemporary mass-media and advertising.

In addition to the criteria members specify when using MySpace's "browse" function, the site also has a "Groups" feature which allows members to form and moderate groups devoted to specific topics. The diversity of MySpace groups is almost as great as the population of members themselves. Groups may be private or public depending on the preference of the moderator, and topics of groups range from fan clubs for celebrities and performers, support groups for mothers and mothers-to-be, groups celebrating a particular ethnic heritage, groups based on sexual practices such as sado-masochism and bondage, feminist groups, book clubs and literature reviews, religious and prayer groups of various denominations, and many more. MySpace gives members the option of listing groups with which they are affiliated on their profiles allowing other members to gain additional insight into what their interests might be. MySpace's "Groups" function and other search tools increase the likelihood of members finding others with similar interests no matter how esoteric they may be, and it makes locating subcultural groups once nearly invisible to outside observers a simple matter of entering the right search criteria.

Though the features of MySpace described above make it an excellent site for interviewing and observing communication between members of subcultures and other minority groups, the same features also make it an ideal site to observe interactions between dominant cultural groups. Individuals can slide between mainstream media and media catering to exclusive interests by effortlessly following hyperlinks present on

almost every website regardless of its content. Jacobs applies Foucault's idea of "heterotopias" to describe this process of almost constant transition on the web in terms of navigating pornographic sites:

With modernity, the medieval concept of space as emplacement is replaced by that of 'heterotopia', a disembodied notion of space whose fixed nature and location is constantly disrupted by transience and ever-shifting relations between places. Foucault was particularly interested in spaces that are linked to 'other' sites and which differ from the sites they reflect and speak about. According to Foucault, heterotopias are capable of taking several sites that are incompatible or 'foreign to one another' and juxtaposing them within a single space (1986, p. 25). Similarly, online consumers practice a pluralistic moral consciousness as they endlessly move between sites and/or long to visit other spaces. Sex sites are effectively linked to 'other' sites, encouraging consumers to satisfy diverse urges and move between activities such as shopping, chatting, peeping, cruising, masturbating and maintaining friendships. Foucault uses the example of festivals and fairgrounds, but one could also make examples of porn spaces as consumers mix and match diverse cultures and types of agency. (Jacobs 2004, 73)

MySpace clearly abounds in "diverse culture and agency," and is designed with the intent of satisfying as many multi-media "urges" of its members as possible. Though MySpace's more recent regulations regarding content are described in detail in Chapter III, the site is still far from implementing close moderation. Such a task would be significantly problematized by MySpace's endorsement of thousands of different sites offering an array of content meant to appeal to both general and specific interests. MySpace has received much public scrutiny and criticism recently due to a series of crimes carried out by members who allegedly used the site's features to perpetrate criminal acts, resulting in demand for more strident monitoring.

One of the most recent and tragic cases involving Missouri woman Lori Drew, accused of creating a fraudulent MySpace profile which led to the suicide of thirteen

year-old Megan Meier,<sup>1</sup> could call into question the ability of web users to create multiple profiles under different identities, a highly common practice of many individuals who frequent online communities. As more and more employers and other types of agencies are beginning to perform routine web searches for background information on employees and potential job candidates, individuals often rely on anonymity to freely express themselves on the web without the threat of potentially damning information falling into the wrong hands. Lori Drew's indictment could have far-reaching consequences for web users, prompting the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) to label the case "overreaching" according to the May 21, 2008 AP article "CDT Balks at MySpace Mom Indictment," and several legal experts agree (<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6563234.html>). As a May 16, 2008 MSNBC.com article by Anick Jesdanun notes,

Andrew DeVore, a former federal prosecutor who co-founded a regional computer crime unit in New York, said Friday the interpretation [of the law under which Drew was indicted] raises constitutional issues related to speech and due process — in the latter case, because it doesn't allow for adequate notice of when using an alias online is criminal. Because corporations would end up setting criminal standards, a completely legal act at one site could be illegal at another, said DeVore, who has no direct involvement in the case. 'What clearly is going on is they couldn't find a way to charge it under traditional criminal law statutes,'

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<sup>1</sup>From a May 15, 2008 article from CNN.com, "Mom Indicted in Deadly MySpace Hoax:" "A Missouri woman was indicted Thursday for her alleged role in perpetrating a hoax on the online social network MySpace against a 13-year-old neighbor who committed suicide. Lori Drew, of suburban St. Louis, allegedly helped create a MySpace account in the name of someone who didn't exist to convince Megan Meier she was chatting with a 16-year-old boy named Josh Evans. She was charged with conspiracy and fraudulently gaining access to someone else's computer. Megan hanged herself at home in October 2006, allegedly after receiving a dozen or more cruel messages, including one stating the world would be better off without her. Salvador Hernandez, assistant agent in charge of the Los Angeles FBI office, called the case heart-rending. 'The Internet is a world unto itself. People must know how far they can go before they must stop. They exploited a young girl's weaknesses,' Hernandez said. 'Whether the defendant could have foreseen the results, she's responsible for her actions.' Drew was charged with one count of conspiracy and three counts of accessing protected computers without authorization to get information used to inflict emotional distress on the girl." (<http://www.cnn.com/2008/CRIME/05/15/internet.suicide.ap/>)

DeVore said. 'The conduct that she engaged in they correctly concluded wouldn't satisfy the statute. Clearly they were looking for some other way to bring a charge.'

Though this particular case is very recent, many public interest groups have petitioned for more strident monitoring of web activity almost from its inception, and the infamous ease with which pornography is accessible to minors has often been a rallying point. So far, the efforts of such groups have resulted largely in failure, but the successful prosecution of Drew could be a landmark for those who advocate web monitoring and censorship.

### Fieldwork and Methodology

Methodology for Chapter II consisted of researching and analyzing ancient Greek texts and images and the scholarship of art historians and Classicists. The research concerning literary criticism was conducted primarily using library resources. Several online resources were used as a source for images. Depictions of gender and sexuality in texts and images of ancient Greek art were then compared and contrasted with images in contemporary mass-media advertisements and depictions of masculinity in popular culture.

Methodology for Chapter III consisted of examining a sample of approximately 3000 men of diverse ethnicities ages 18-30 who reside in the US. All research conducted online focuses solely on members of MySpace.com. Using the website's own search engine, this study analyzes existing photos and texts posted by members who meet the search criteria. The parameters of the search were set to specify heterosexual men of all ethnicities ages 18-30 who live in the US, and I examined the first 3000 results. I began

researching media on MySpace in May 2005, and concluded my research in April 2008. In addition to observing the written text and photos yielded in search results, I distributed a survey consisting of five questions aimed at gathering men's opinions about the pictures and written texts they have chosen to post.

The survey was distributed randomly to approximately 500 members out of the sample of 3000. Surveys were anonymous and participation was voluntary. No data consisting of names, URLs, or other identifying information were coded, collected or reported. MySpace restricts this type information from the general public and advises users not to reveal it in their profiles. The survey questions were also not designed to collect personally identifiable information, and no respondents chose to reveal any such information in their replies. The survey questions were as follows:

- 1).What made you choose these pictures of yourself?
- 2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?
- 3).What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace?
- 4).What do you think makes a man "successful?" in contemporary American culture? What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?
- 5).What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)?

The survey questions were designed to gather opinions on abstract and general concepts such as success and societal expectations, but also specifically address the member's choice of photos and motives for choosing them.

I examined the images, written texts, and various responses to the five survey questions above to gain insight into the criteria men follow when presenting their bodies, what motivates them to do so, and an idea of their perceptions regarding what is expected of them from women on MySpace. With two exceptions, the surveys, text, and photos of

individuals are not tied together in order to further preserve the anonymity of MySpace members. Examining the photographic and textual evidence posted by male members of MySpace make it possible to determine whether conventions consistent with those found in advertising are employed, and whether similarities in photos and texts are a conscious or unconscious decision on the part of the men who post them. Information collected in this study can begin to illuminate the effects of the mass-media and advertising on men's body consciousness and self-perception. Because this research focuses on men who all share the common identifying factor of MySpace membership and the additional criteria specified above, they employ similar conventions and modes of self-expression to construct individual identities. Their common modes of self expression and communication establish them as a distinct folk group within the community of cyberspace, although they are also representative of their gender as a whole. Examining the way these men construct their individual identities while adhering to the conventions unique to their particular folk group provides valuable insight into vernacular constructions of gender and sexuality. The conventions and expressions of the men of MySpace meet the definition of vernacular since they reflect the popular tastes of a broader cultural sampling and are therefore significant to folklore and gender studies.

## CHAPTER II

### MALE BEAUTY IN ANTIQUITY

#### The Good, the Bad, and Socrates

Classical Greco-Roman art is unique for its innovations in representing the human form. Greco-Roman art of the Early Classical Period (480-323 BCE) through the Hellenistic Period (323-31 BCE) features the human body without significant stylistic distortion, engaged in natural poses and movements (fig. 1 below). Through its evolution from the High Archaic Period (625-480 BCE) to the Hellenistic Period, the various incarnations of the male and female form give insight into the aesthetic world of the ancient Greeks and the subtle ways it continues to influence contemporary American culture and the Western world in general.



Fig. 1. Red-figure wrestlers and underwear model  
(<http://upload.wikimedia.org>) (<http://www.mensunderwearstore.com/>)



When one analyzes both male and female figures featured in Greek art, patterns indicative of what, in popular opinion, was considered aesthetically “beautiful” emerge. For the purposes of this thesis I will examine a selection of primary sources from Plato and others that are concerned with the nature of love and physical beauty, as well as “appropriate” conduct, roles, and ideals for both sexes. I will also examine vase painting and sculptures, particularly those dealing with erotic or “pornographic” subjects, produced between the High Archaic and Hellenistic Periods in order to illustrate where ideals concerning gender and beauty conform, and where they conflict with those presented in the texts. Finally, I will consider examples from contemporary advertising that highlight the continuation of, and sometimes complete departure from, the aesthetic principles and gender ideals of ancient Greece. This final set of examples anticipates the next chapter, where I will explore contemporary images featured in the mass-media and vernacular expressions of aesthetics and gender in depth.

Artistic representations of both male and female figures, from the red-figure technique of High Archaic Athenian pottery to the life-size bronzes of the Hellenistic Period, generate much speculation concerning Greek aesthetic preferences and ideals. Difficulty in reconciling modern ideologies with ancient concepts of gender and sexuality complicates attempts to determine how such depictions were meant to be received, their intended audience, and their relationship to how life in ancient Athens was actually experienced by men and women. Such difficulties affect the ability to accurately interpret representations concerning explicitly sexual situations and subjects and the significance of nudity in general, whether in sexual or nonsexual contexts. The well-documented

elements of homosexuality and pederasty in ancient Athens lead some scholars such as Andrew Stewart (1997) to interpret a large number of instances of nudity in the Classical and Hellenistic Periods as ones aimed at producing homosexual desire.

One of the more significant problems created by our lack of proximity to ancient life is the modern view of sexuality. This modern view distinguishes homosexuality from heterosexuality based on object choice, whereas according to Michel Foucault (1978), Kenneth J. Dover (1978), and more recently Holt N. Parker (1992), ancient Greeks viewed sexuality in vastly different terms. Parker states, “Both Greek and Roman male sexuality was constructed on the division between active and passive.” (Parker 1992, 99) That the overwhelming majority of evidence on the subject is produced or authored by men with only a few notable exceptions further adds to the difficulties our lack of proximity to the ancient world presents for interpreting ancient representations of gendered bodies. However, regardless of such difficulties, the various incarnations of the male and female form throughout the Archaic and Classical periods provide a wealth of information concerning sexuality and aesthetic ideals, however stylized and obscured by temporal distance those representations may be.

Much art is created with the recipient’s gaze as its primary concern; technique depends upon both the medium and how an audience is meant to receive a work of art. Basing their arguments on the cultural norms concerning gender and sexuality apparent in these two cultures, scholars such as Stewart argue that the majority of Classical Greek and Roman art was created with the intent of appealing almost exclusively to the male gaze. A discussion of female sexuality is therefore necessary to encompass the aesthetic

preferences and ideals of both sexes in ancient Greece, and to expand the view of art as created by and for men alone. Although the female gaze may have been considered on the part of both artists and recipients in ancient Greek art, the one who rendered such works was most commonly male. The consequence of the patriarchal structure of Athens was the preferential treatment of males throughout society, a fact that makes it difficult to ascertain what women experienced and preferred. The bulk of evidence from the Archaic and Classical periods is also almost completely the work of males. In addition to the influences of the patriarchal structure of ancient Athens upon its art, male homosexuality further problematizes the interpretation of erotic scenes for scholars of art and Classics. Remarking on the “deficiency” created by these two factors in *Greek Homosexuality*, Kenneth J. Dover writes,

The subject is richly documented, though it has one important deficiency: all Greek art, literature and archival material, with the exception of a little poetry surviving only in fragments and citations, was the work of males, and the evidence bearing upon female sexuality of any kind is exiguous by comparison with the superabundant evidence for male homosexuality. (Dover 1978, 2)

In addition to this perceived deficit of art constructed by or for females and the female gaze, ancient texts support the claim that women in Athens were only permitted to be gazed *upon* in certain circumstances. According to these texts, women belonged behind closed doors and isolated from their publicly active male counterparts, creating the impression that their tastes and preferences were never influential factors in the production of art or popular aesthetic tastes. One such text is *Lysias III*, the trial of the Greek citizen Simon, accused of assaulting another free man in a street brawl over a

young male lover (whose non-citizen status confirms that he was almost certainly a prostitute).

Among the many charges leveled upon Simon in *Lysias III*, the incident concerning his forced entry into the home of Lysias' client resulting in his female kin being "seen" is particularly indicative of the place of females and the female gaze in ancient Greece (3.6). Such texts clearly convey the belief that women belonged behind closed doors and isolated from their publicly active male counterparts, and convey the idea that their tastes and preferences were not influential factors in the production of art or popular aesthetic tastes. That men and women existed and interacted with each other in society, regardless of the nature of that interaction and the subordination of one group to the other, is reason enough to question the image these texts create. In his essay "Pornography and Persuasion on Attic Pottery", Robert F. Sutton challenges views based on the sparse textual evidence concerning women's position in Greek society. Robert Sutton's essays on pornographic vase painting are striking for two reasons: first, contrary to many depictions of women in Athens as confined and not involved in the production or consumption of art, he argues that women were a major factor in the purchase of such vases, and that vase painting itself enjoyed both male and female audiences:

While it is said that in Athens respectable women did not venture from the seclusion of their homes to shop, the evidence is scanty at best, delivered by males, and skewed to the ideal of the leisure class; it should not be used to suggest that women played only a minor roles in selecting vases for their own use, whether individual women actually left their houses for the occasion, dealt with itinerant vendors, or acted through second parties from their own households. (Sutton 1992, 5)

Secondly, as stated in the introduction, Sutton argues that vase-painting was equivalent in scope to contemporary mass-media (Sutton 1992, 4). If images on vases were so widely created and disseminated, the bodies featured on them would surely have reflected the aesthetic ideals of both sexes in Athenian society rather than catering to an exclusively male audience.

In addition to his arguments concerning the scale and intended audience of the vases, Sutton also analyzes representations which he argues convey the “high hopes” of Athenian women for romantic love within the confines of arranged marriage (Sutton 1992, 12). Such images are remarkable in the challenge they pose to previous conceptions of the bleak arrangement between husband and wife described by Xenophon and Lysias, among others. Sutton reminds us that such works were also rhetorical, authored by and for men, and offer no more a complete picture of Athenian women’s lives than the erotic imagery featured in vase painting. Female nudes in scenes depicting bathing and wedding rituals cannot be dismissed as *hetairai* simply by virtue of their nudity (Sutton 1992, 24), and the subjects of feminine sensuality and nuptial romance are certainly within the realm of acceptable for “respectable” women of Athens, as they are for Athenian men. Fig. 2 below is one of the most noteworthy and widely cited examples of “romantic” heterosexual love in erotic vase-painting. Unlike depictions featuring men engaged in sexual acts with women (particularly those of the orgiastic variety) where rear-entry sex is featured most often and eliminates the possibility of eye contact, the couple in fig. 2 face each other, gazing into each other’s eyes.

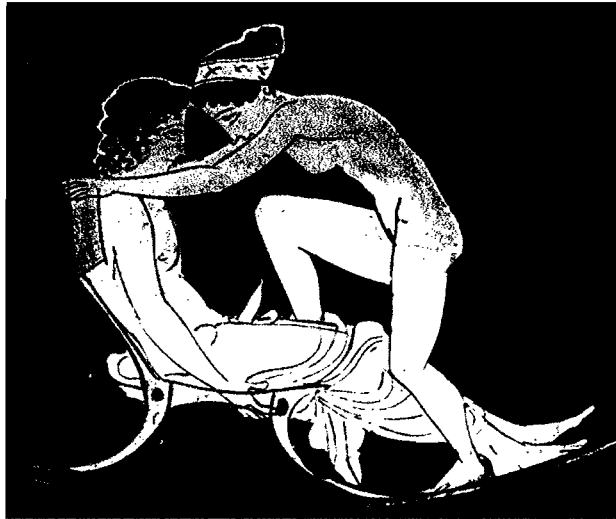


Fig. 2. Attic red-figure oinochoe attributed to the Shuvalov Painter (430 BCE)  
([http://art-mind.org/review/IMG/jpg/Hyman\\_Fig6.jpg](http://art-mind.org/review/IMG/jpg/Hyman_Fig6.jpg))

Compare fig. 2 to fig. 3 below, where the couple is depicted in the more typical rear-entry position, and the caption visible beginning on the woman's diaphragm and ending near her shin reads, "Be still" or "Be quiet".<sup>2</sup>

H.A. Shapiro narrows the category of "pornographic" vase painting to symposium ware, where the only women present were flute girls and other hetairai. Shapiro argues that homosexuality and pederasty portrayed on such vases are not pornographic in the "etymological" sense because they lack the elements characteristic of their heterosexual counterparts (Shapiro 1992, 56). He points to the absence of both anal and oral intercourse in such scenes, acts which feature prominently in more "orgiastic" depictions where female hetairai are present. Omission of these two acts denotes a more restrained, reserved, and dignified treatment of the male homoerotic subject.

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<sup>2</sup> See Sutton's translation (Richland 1992, 12).



Fig. 3. Interior of red-figure cup by Douris (475 BCE)  
(<http://mfa.org/collections>)

Shapiro argues that social status is equally as relevant as gender difference in depictions of *erastes-eromenos* erotic relations, and the reserved tone of scenes featuring homosexual courtship prevents them from being categorized as pornography because they fail to portray sexual activity in a “heightened, exaggerated, and violent manner” (Shapiro 1992, 57). Shapiro employs mythological examples, specifically the abduction of Ganymede, to further illustrate the discrepancy between depictions of homoerotic love and heterosexual pursuit. Zeus’ infatuation with the perfect specimen of boyhood may be, according to Shapiro, the closest equivalent to homosexual Greek pornography. He argues that such a label is too strong for such stylized representation, as is the case for symposium ware depicting homosexual subjects.

Holt N. Parker treats the subject of pornography according to formalist criteria in “Love’s Body Anatomized: The Ancient Erotic Handbooks and the Rhetoric of

Sexuality.” He argues that contemporary ideology defines pornography by content, whereas for Greeks and Romans, genre was determined by form, an argument supported by Aristotle’s *Poetics*: “For both the Greeks and the Romans, genre is determined principally by form and only secondarily by content.” (Parker 1992, 91) One subspecies of literature alone, works of *an-aiskhunto-graphoi*, can be compared to the modern conception of pornography in that it is defined by its content—“shameless things.” (Parker 1992, 91) Parker compares this subgenre to handbooks or “sex manuals”, the contents of which were limited to “listing, enumerating, and limiting the positions for heterosexual intercourse (still a flourishing type).” (Parker 1992, 91) The authorship of these handbooks was attributed almost exclusively to women. However, this attribution is false, or what Parker refers to as a “male-created mask” (Parker 1992, 92).<sup>3</sup> In addition to establishing an authentic pornographic subgenre that accords with the modern definition of pornography, Parker also deconstructs the representations of both male and female sexuality featured in the handbooks. Explicit in the representations of female sexuality are the ideas of passivity, inactivity, licentiousness, insatiability, and worst of all (in the eyes of the ancients), luxury and overindulgence. The latter two qualities describe not only female characteristics but the content of the manuals themselves, a quality that makes their female authorship a “natural” consequence (Parker 1992, 99).

In “Callirhoe: Displaying the Phallic Woman,” Helen E. Elsom argues that both ancient romances and pornography share the common structure of exposing women to the

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<sup>3</sup> Such information casts light on Plato’s seemingly anomalous choice of Diotima the priestess as the character who instructs Socrates on the true nature of love in his *Symposium*, though Parker’s essay is not concerned with this particular work.



public gaze (Elsom 1992, 214). Contrary to Parker's formalist definition of pornography, Elsom cites evidence from a medical text authored by the doctor Theodorus Priscianus who lists as a treatment for impotence not only procuring the services of pretty girls and boys, but also the reading of texts aimed at turning the mind "*ad delicias*", which Elsom translates as "to sexual pleasures" (Elsom 1992, 215). The text the doctor advises is "*certe*" ("certain," or as Elsom translates, "above all") to achieve the desired effect is the novel of Iamblichus. Elsom cites the epitome of Photius in describing the novel's content as "a boy-girl love and adventure story with rivals and false deaths, not unlike the romances we are discussing." (Elsom 1992, 215) Elsom argues that the romance clearly functions in a pornographic capacity for its ability to impart an erection to the male reader (Elsom 1992, 215). However, she also concedes that Priscianus' status as a medical man permits him to discuss such texts in terms of their ability to create sexual arousal. Holt's formal analysis of genre applies if the sexual subject of romantic texts was the primary consideration only in specific and isolated situations, rather than the defining characteristic of the genre of romance novel itself.

Vases depicting female abuse and subordination in the old komos tradition become hostile between 510-470 BCE (Sutton 1992, 11). The most extreme of these scenes, according to Sutton, is a cup attributed to the Pedieus Painter:

The women there [on the cup] are beaten with slippers as they serve male gratification fore and aft; they are shown as middle-aged and fat, in striking contrast to the idealizing conventions of vase painting, and the unusual creases shown around their mouths express the disfiguration caused by performing fellatio. (Sutton 1992, 11-12)



Fig 4. Red-figure cup by Pedieus Painter (<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons>)

The move from indifference to open hostility towards the female subject corresponds to the beginning stages of Athenian Democracy and the Persian Wars, a connection Sutton argues illustrates the turbulence and social unrest Athenian citizens surely experienced during this period (Sutton 1992, 11). Sutton argues such scenes express not only male power over female, but also “young over old, free over slave, and employer over employee” (Sutton 1992, 12).

Allowing homosexuality and pederasty to dominate interpretations of erotic Athenian vase painting and male nudes ignores the highly stylized literary and artistic qualities that render them idealized rather than representative. At the same time, underestimating the prevalence of male homoeroticism and pederasty in ancient Greek society also leads to an insufficient understanding of such representations, especially those featuring the courting rituals and sexual acts that characterize the relationship

between the *erastes* and the *eromenos*. Dover describes the relationship between the *erastes* and the *eromenos* as one of quid pro quo. The *eromenos* must gain the benefit of intellectual gifts from his *erastes* in exchange for sexual favors and reciprocation. Citing the speech of Aiskhines from *The Prosecution of Timarkhos*, Dover writes that, “to follow a boy because one is in love with him is permissible, but to express one’s emotions overtly in any other way is not permissible until the boy is old enough to judge one’s character.” (Dover 1998, 49) In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, proper conduct for the *erastes* and the *eromenos* are discussed at length, as well as the true nature and expression of *eros*. Socrates responds to a speech, supposedly authored by Lysias, praising non-lovers for their willingness to continue to bestow “good things,” favors, upon the objects of their affection after the initial physical passion of *eros* has subsided (234a). Clearly, age was an important factor in gauging the appropriateness of any sexual relationship, and was therefore an important element in artistic representations of sexual interaction for the Greek audience, and one aspect of Greek art that differs significantly from mass-media.

The beard, attire, physical proximity, and gestures of male subjects, as well as various objects present in scenes, such as garlands and gifts, gave the viewer distinct contextual evidence of the ages of the figures represented in Greek art.<sup>4</sup> For an ancient Greek audience to successfully understand and appreciate the scenarios depicted in art, it was crucial for the artist to successfully convey the ages of his male subjects, thereby illustrating the nature of the sexual and platonic relationships featured. Though attitudes toward homoerotic sexual relations in ancient Greece were certainly favorable, social

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<sup>4</sup> See both Dover and Foucault.

conventions dictated the proper norms for such relationships. Such a judgment was arbitrary, however, since no official age is recorded or recognized in Greek law (Dover, 1978) as in the contemporary American judicial system. Interestingly, the sign of maturity (the beard) was a visual one, rather than a specific age or rite of passage.

Examining the constructs of gendered bodies in ancient Greek art, Andrew Stewart identifies several formulas that governed the contexts in which both men and women were featured nude, the evolution of ideals of masculinity and femininity, and the historical significance of representing either sex as naked or clothed as a means of distinction. Stewart's analysis is conducted with the political realities of ancient Greece, the looming patriarchal society founded on the premise of natural male supremacy, as the guiding force that shaped the Greek conception of the ideal human body and the artistic representations that sought to convey it. In addition to Greek socio-political norms that favored men, Stewart also examines the influence of Greek "institutionalized pederasty" and the *erastes-eromenos* relationship evoked by the numerous *kouri*, monuments of nude male youths that served funerary or votive purposes,<sup>5</sup> by public monuments such as the Parthenon frieze and the Tyrannicides Harmodios and Aristogeiton by Kritios and Nesiotes, and by artifacts intended for private use such as sympotic drinking vessels (Stewart 1997, 10, 22).

The Tyrannicides Harmodios and his lover Aristogeiton (fig. 5) were commemorated as defenders of democracy after their unsuccessful attempt to murder the tyrant of Athens (Hurwit, 39). Their attempt failed, although they succeeded in killing the

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<sup>5</sup> See both Hurwit and Gardner's *Art through the Ages*.

tyrant's brother Hipparkhos (Hurwit, 39). The motive for the Tyrannicides' vengeance was actually personal rather than political; the tyrant of Athens had made sexual advances upon the young Harmodios, spurning the anger of the older Aristogeiton. Hurwit stresses the political ramifications of commemorating the Tyrannicides: "Though the assassination was the result of a personal vendetta rather than a political revolution, though Harmodios and Aristogeiton were promptly executed for their crime, and though the tyranny (harsher now) endured four more years, once it fell, Harmodios and Aristogeiton became heroes of the new democracy." (Hurwit 2007, 39) Stewart, however, considers the commemoration of the Tyrannicides as indicating a pivotal shift in the attitudes of Athenians regarding male homo-erotic relationships.

Stewart analyzes the shift in social attitudes that produced the smooth-cheeked figures that represent the culmination of "youthening" and male Athenian homoerotic desire. According to Stewart, Praxiteles's Aphrodite of Knidos and Polykleitos of Argos's Doryphoros are the chief icons of the ancient world, the "new metaphysic" of masculinity and femininity. Stewart attempts to reconcile the distant expressions of the *kouroi* and Polykleitos's *Doryphoros* that render them impervious to the desiring homoerotic gaze, but only partially accounts for the apparent conflict between the way they are represented and the way in which the spectator was, by Stewart's own assessment, able to receive them.



Fig. 5. The Tyrannicides Harmodios and Aristogeiton, by Kritios and Nesiotes (BCE 477) (<http://upload.wikimedia.org>)



Fig. 6. Anavyssos Kouros (Attic, BCE 530) (<http://upload.wikimedia.org>)

Likewise, Stewart's description of the naked and half-naked youths of the Parthenon frieze as "clever, witty come-ons deftly inserted to engage and arouse the citizen spectator" (Stewart 1997, 82) is equally difficult to reconcile with his observation that because of their nudity, they are automatically distinguishable, marked for the eye's immediate recognition.



Fig. 7. Parthenon inner Ionic frieze depicting youths with horses (447-438 BCE)  
(<http://upload.wikimedia.org>)



Fig. 8. New York Kouros (Attic, BCE 600)  
([http://br.geocities.com/georgekroust/kouros\\_kroisos.jpg](http://br.geocities.com/georgekroust/kouros_kroisos.jpg))



Fig. 9. Aristodikos Kouros (Attic, BCE 500)  
([http://www.greeceathens.com/pages\\_images/20.jpg](http://www.greeceathens.com/pages_images/20.jpg))

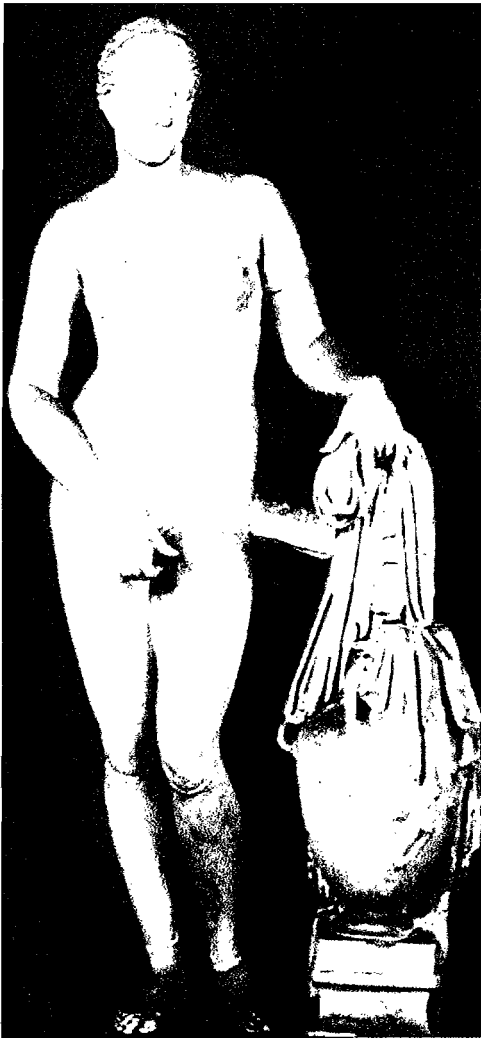


Fig. 10. *Aphrodite of Knidos* by Praxiteles  
(<http://witcombe.sbc.edu/willendorf/images/praxitelesaphrodite.jpg>)

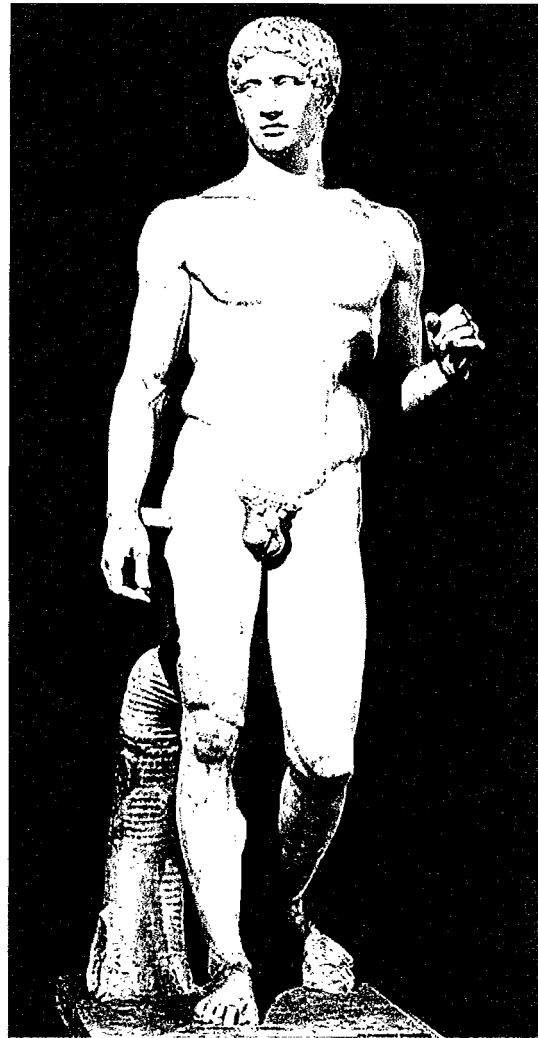


Fig. 11. *Doryphoros* (Spear-bearer), by Polykleitos of Argos  
(<http://academic.reed.edu/.../html/doryphoros1.html>)

Stewart's analysis of the female form and its various incarnations in ancient art culminates in the *Aphrodite of Knidos* and provides the contrast necessary to further illustrate the attributes of Greek masculinity by presenting femininity as its eventual polar opposite. Such a comparison again highlights the social gendering of the ancient world, the "pessimistic conviction that war and procreation were what men and women,



respectively, were made for,” (Stewart 1997, 86) and the correlation between nakedness, eroticism (both homo and hetero) and the desiring gaze. Stewart apparently interprets the following description of the *Aphrodite of Knidos* attributed to Lucian (though most likely a later imitator) in the *Amores* 13-14 as serious rather than satirical critical account, as does Foucault:

The temple has doors at both ends too, for those who want to see the goddess in detail from the back, in order that no part of her may not be wondered at. So it is easy for men entering at the other door to examine the beautiful form behind. So we decided to see the whole of the goddess and went around to the back of the statue. Then, when the door was opened by the keeper of the keys, sudden wonder gripped us at the beauty of the woman entrusted to us. Well, the Athenian, when he had looked on quietly for a little, caught sight of the love parts of the goddess, and immediately cried out much more madly than Kharikles, 'Herakles! What a fine rhythm to her back! Great flanks! What a handful to embrace! Look at the way of the flesh of the buttocks, beautifully outlined, is arched, not meanly drawn in too close to the bones but not allowed to spread out in excessive fat. No one could express the sweet smile of the shape impressed upon the hips. How precise the rhythm of thigh and calf all the way down to the foot! Such a Ganymede pours nectar sweetly for Zeus in heaven! For I would have received no drink if Hebe had been serving.' As Kallikratidas had made this inspired cry, Kharikles was virtually transfixed with amazement, his eyes growing damp with a watering complaint. (*Amores*, 13-14)

The reaction of the Athenian Kallikratidas and the humorous explanation for the “bruise” on the statue’s thigh (a seemingly obvious reference to intercrural<sup>6</sup> intercourse) clearly indicate that this passage was not intended to accurately convey the statue’s attributes, but was constructed for the purpose of a satirical social critique. Thus, attempting to ascribe homoerotic desire to the features of the Aphrodite of Knidos and whole periods of

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<sup>6</sup> “Intercrural” refers to the practice of thrusting the penis between the clenched thighs of a sexual partner. See both Foucault and Hurwit

Greek art in general is an endeavor requiring careful approach and application, as are the representations of masculinity in both art and text.

Accurately representing age in scenes depicting male homoeroticism stands in stark contrast to the uniformly youthful appearance of figures in ancient Greek funerary stelai (a concept discussed in greater detail in section 2.2). The ideal male youth represented in Greek art are featured with broad shoulders, well-defined abdomens, muscular thighs, and symmetrical, proportionate, and uncircumcised genitalia. As previously mentioned, the older males are featured with beards while youths are smooth-faced, and their muscular bulk, particularly in the areas of the chest and shoulders, sometimes exceeds that of the youths they are engaged in copulation or titillation with, as the illustrations below depict.



**Fig 12. Pederastic courtship.** Detail from side A of an black-figure Attic hydria, ca. 540 BC.  
( <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image>)



**Fig. 13. Pederastic courtship.** Attic black-figure (close-up) (530-520 BCE)  
( <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image>)



Fig. 14. Red-figure kylix by Peithinos (700 BCE)  
(<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image>)



Fig. 15. Black-figure Amphora by the Cambridge Painter  
(540 BCE) (<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image>)



Fig. 16. "Pederastic Courtship", Attic Black-Figure (530-520 BCE)  
(<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image>)



Fig. 17. Red-figure tondo "At the Palaestra" (540-530 BCE)  
( <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image>)

The images above feature males engaged in the stylistically typical courtship gestures of the *erastes-eromenos* relationship. The adult male often cups the chin of the youth in one hand while fondling the genitals with the other. Shared eye contact is almost always depicted uniformly unlike many heterosexual scenes, particularly those involving hetairai. Both male youths and adults are often featured presenting, accepting, or adorned with gifts and offerings typical of sympotic gatherings, such as wreaths and garlands, and small animals such as hares and birds. The conventions and highly stylized representations of this relationship between adult men and male youths allude to its complexity, a visual partner of dialogues like Plato's *Symposium* aimed at establishing

the “right” way to conduct such courtship. The subject of sex itself may be lampooned in erotic vase-painting, but depictions of the *erastes-eromenos* relationship are almost always treated with a dignified beauty that renders the label of “pornography” an oversimplification, as previously noted by Shapiro. Neither the *erastes* nor the *eromenos* are the subjects of abuse such as that depicted on the aforementioned cup by the Pedieus Painter, and the tone of their physical interaction never resembles that of the Douris cup with its “Keep Still” caption (fig 2).

### Satyrs and Underwear Models

The Greek disposition toward individuals who displayed unusually enthusiastic sexual appetites for members of either sex was one of disdain. Such behavior was indicative of a moral fiber which was necessarily lacking, a weakness of character. Dialogues in both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* are clear indicators of philosophical attitudes regarding those who were unable to moderate their sexual desires.

We must next consider how he who is forced to follow pleasure and not good will keep the body of him whose master he is, and what care he will give to it. He will plainly court a beloved who is effeminate, not virile, not brought up in the pure sunshine, but in mingled shade, unused to manly toils and the sweat of exertion, but accustomed to a delicate and unmanly mode of life, adorned with a bright complexion of artificial origin, since he has none by nature, and in general living a life such as all this indicates, which it is certainly not worthwhile to describe further. (*Phaedrus*, 239c-d)

Ironically, though artistic depictions of the *erastes* became more and more feminized so that by Plato’s time sculptures such as the *Kritios Boy* had more in common with their earlier female counterparts, literary accounts never indicate that the portrayal of feminine

characteristics is acceptable for men in art or everyday life. Though Stewart and Dover both interpret this gradual feminization of the male figure as further evidence of homosexuality's increased influence in Athenian art and culture, no textual evidence corroborates the view that feminine qualities were ever acceptable, much less preferred in men, whether they were *erastes* or *eromenos*.

Men featured in contemporary mass-media and advertising are also selected for their muscular physiques, but they are almost always "young" men, below the age of thirty. In addition, genitalia displayed (or draped yet recognizable) by men in advertising and the mass media is far larger than the modest proportions of their ancient Greek counterparts. In fact, according to the aesthetic standards of the ancient Greeks, disproportionately large genitals were the hallmark of "ugly" and "uncivilized," as comedic depictions of satyrs illustrate (Dover 1978, B80). The satyrs on the amphora below in fig. 16 attributed to the Amasis painter all have characteristically overdeveloped genitals and exposed glans, although the exposed glans do not necessarily indicate that the penis is erect as the satyr on the far left illustrates. However, the glans is seldom fully visible on uncircumcised, human males of erotic vase painting and statuary unless depicted with erect penises, as the first and second photos indicate. Though athletic prowess and muscular torsos are also apparent in modern depictions of males in advertising and the mass-media, far more emphasis is placed on the size of the genitals than in ancient erotic vase painting.

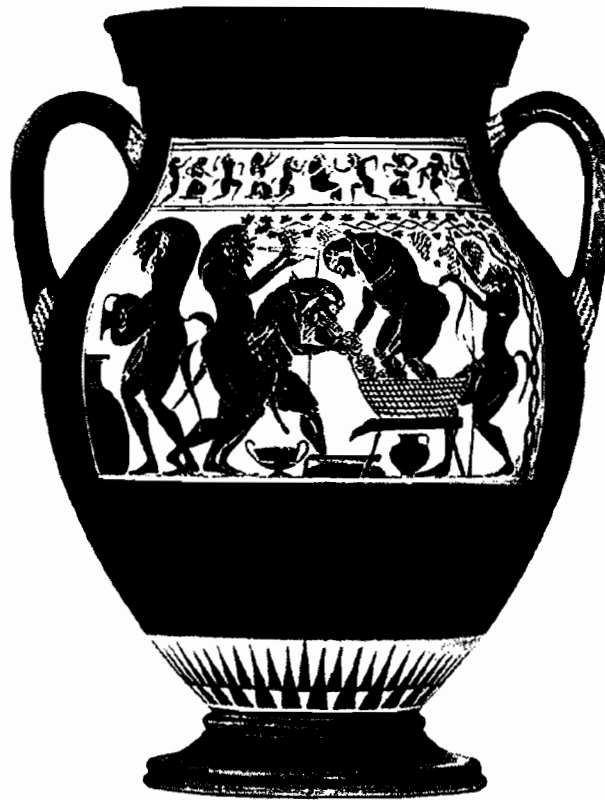


Fig. 18. Black-figure amphora by Amasis Painter (530 BCE)  
 (<https://www.utexas.edu/courses/classicaldig/Archaic/9901030004.jpg>)

Dover argues that females on vases from the Archaic and Classical periods are almost indistinguishable from males except for the presence of breasts. They share the same male bulge of muscle above the hip bone, and their facial features are almost indistinguishable. On the kylix below in fig. 17, a satyr attacks a female (most likely a maenad). Her broad shoulders and muscular abdomen make her all but indistinguishable from her male counterpart, although the obvious presence of breasts confirms her identity as a female: “On many occasions, however, male and female bodies are distinguishable only by the presence or absence of breasts and the external genitals” (Dover 1978, 70).



**Fig. 19. Red-figure kylix depicting satyr and maenad**  
 (<http://www.artsjournal.com/culturegrrrl/EuphNew.jpg>)

Both this argument concerning representations of female bodies and the one concerning later feminized male figures seem to contradict each other in two ways: First, both arguments are constructed with male homoeroticism as the explanation for feminizing men and masculinizing women in Greek art. However, if this is the case in every observable instance of artistic “gender bending,” it is not clear whether what is being expressed is a preference for the feminine or the masculine. But, as previously cited from Parker, ancient texts provide evidence that the Greeks only considered specific sexual acts in male-male liaisons to indicate effeminacy, and men who embodied typically “female” characteristics of behavior were almost never portrayed in a favorable light, as the earlier passage from the *Phaedrus* illustrates.



Secondly, both arguments seem to overlook the representations of male and female figures in the Early and Late Geometric Periods. The High Archaic Period marks the pioneering and perfecting of techniques allowing departure from the limited patterns imposed on figures that characterize the Early and Late Geometric style. With the development of red and black-figure techniques, the human form was freed from the constraints of earlier methods and imbued with more life-like motion and expression, as the vases of Euthymides and Onesimos illustrate. The sculptures of the Classical Period are the culmination of centuries devoted to perfecting the representation of the human form. The progression of muscular depiction in the *kouroi*, the increasingly intricate, “diaphanous” drapery culminating in the figures of the Temple of Athena Nike, and the perfect formulaic symmetry of the *Doryphoros* all comprise a distinct timeline illustrating the path to eventual mastery of the human form.

The *Kritios Boy*, often considered the quintessential example of the departure from the rigid, Egyptian-inspired posture of early *kouroi* and the shift towards “feminized” youths in Classical sculpture, was created for the specific purpose of adorning the Acropolis. Its form dictates its function—to decorate, enhance, and beautify. When compared to the fierceness of the bronze Riace “A” Warrior in fig. 19 whose body is no less “perfect” than the *Doryphoros*, but whose masculinity is unquestionable (not least of all because of its mature, bearded face), the *Kritios Boy* seems feminine indeed. But the Riace statue is a warrior, and its “perfect” body and aggressive posture are meant to inspire primarily fear and awe. The *Kritios Boy* was meant to adorn the Acropolis, not defend it, and as such it was meant to inspire awe of its beauty, not of its fearsome

martial prowess. The “springtime” of beauty, the “bloom of youth,” subject of countless accolades and sympotic verse, is rendered in Classical statuary with the full lips, fair hair, and demure posture of the *Kritios Boy*.<sup>7</sup> Obsession with the beauty of youth is well-documented in the practice of “youthening” figures in art during the Classical and Hellenistic periods regardless of how their “actual” ages correspond to portraits and depictions of events.<sup>8</sup>

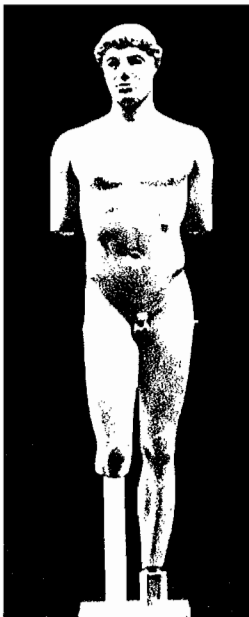


Fig. 20. *Kritios Boy* (480 BCE)

( <http://www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/KritiosBoyF&S.jpg>)

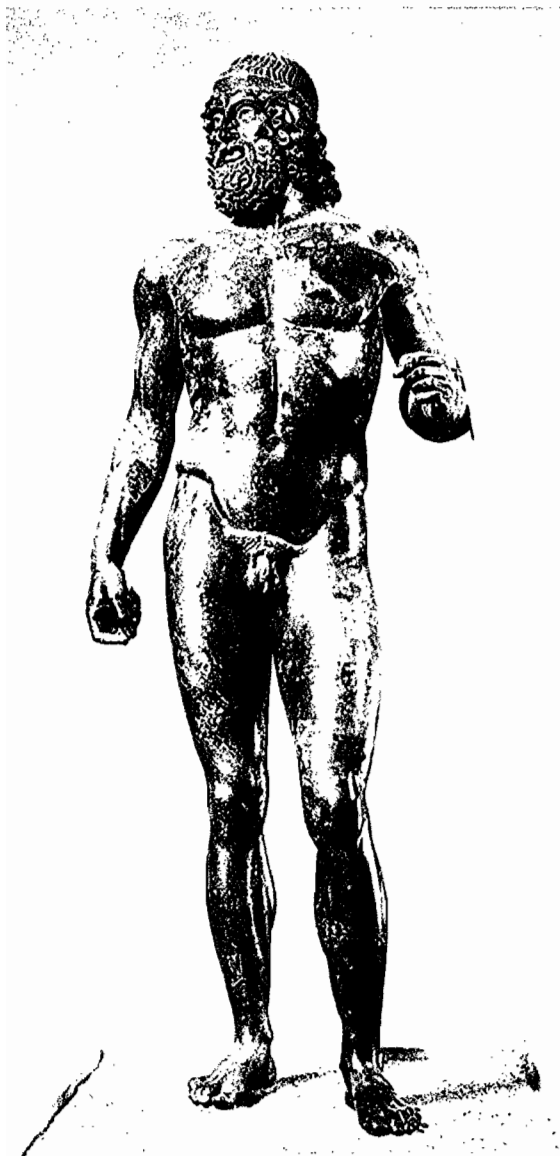


Fig. 21. *Blonde Boy* (480 BCE)

( [http://www.uoregon.edu/~arthist/arthist\\_204](http://www.uoregon.edu/~arthist/arthist_204))

<sup>7</sup> See both Hurwit and Gardner's *Art through the Ages*.

<sup>8</sup> Stewart, cited in Hurwit.



**Fig. 22. Riace Warrior "A" (BCE 460-450)**  
(<http://www.utexas.edu/courses/introtogreece>)



**Fig. 23. Riace Warrior "B" (BCE 430-420)**  
(<http://www.utexas.edu/courses/introtogreece>)

Remarking on the youthened appearances and nudity of figures in funerary monuments, Jeffrey Hurwit writes, “Now, there is nothing shameful about Archaic kouroi set over the graves of dead warriors. Kroisis, for example, and Aristodikos are embodiments of a *thanatos kalos*, a ‘beautiful death,’ that present nude, idealized, and ‘youthened’ bodies for the mourner to view and admire, private parts and all.” (Hurwit 2007, 48) If the *Kritios Boy* appeals to the modern notion of “female” beauty, the argument is just as easily made that the essence of youthful beauty itself is distilled to a conventional artistic standard and consciously applied to both male and female representations of the human figure by the artists themselves. In fact, though most often used in a denigrating manner, the contemporary American expression “pretty boy” suggests that the idea of male beauty is still prevalent, though it also implies that men who capitalize on their “prettiness” are guilty of effeminacy, the kind of men Socrates describes in the above passages of the *Phaedrus*. The broad, muscular shoulders, well-defined pectoral and abdominal muscles, and powerful thighs of the *Kritios Boy* do not convey the appearance of a man who was raised in “mingled shade.” Only the statue’s facial expression and relaxed stance are “soft,” a characteristically female attribute in both modern and ancient paradigms of gender. However, these two feminine elements of the *Kritios Boy* and other male statuary are not enough to confirm a preference for effeminate youths among the Athenians

None of the above statements discount observations concerning the “feminized” appearance of the *Kritios Boy* and other similar representations of the male figure. Noting the feminized features of it and other statuary of the Classical Period does not equate to

acknowledging them as direct products of increased popularity of male homoeroticism. Yet, ignoring the presence of homosexuality and pederasty in the fourth and fifth centuries is as detrimental to the analytical process as reducing every work of art to a byproduct of the same. The self-conscious expression of *ethos* does, as Stewart suggests, allow the viewer to objectify figures in Classical art in a manner the distant gaze and Archaic smile (such as that of the *kouroi*) of earlier monuments do not permit. Attributing this evolution of representation solely to male homoeroticism causes Stewart to make reductionist claims such as labeling the naked youths of the Parthenon frieze “clever, witty come-ons”, a view that ignores not only the complexity of the *erastes-eromenos* relationship previously discussed, but the complexity of the relationship between art and culture as well.

The emphasis on bulging male genitalia as “attractive” or “manly” in contemporary advertising is illustrated by fig. 24-26 below, all of which are advertisements for men’s underwear. Not only are the men in the photos featured above extremely muscular, their genitals seem to have more in common with the depictions of satyrs than with Greek men and youths. Emphasis on the bulging thighs of both youths



Fig. 24. Men’s underwear ad



Fig. 25. Men’s underwear ad



Fig. 26. Men’s underwear ad

(Fig. 22-24: <http://www.mensunderwearstore.com/>)

and men, particularly in High Archaic representations, is also not a prevalent feature in the images above and in most contemporary advertising. The practice of intercrural sex, as previously mentioned, may account for the bulging thighs in the male figures of Greek art, and is not widely practiced among gay men in present-day America. However, though his thighs and genitals have little in common with the ideal youths of Greek art, the pose of the model in fig. 22 is strikingly similar to that of the athletes featured on the Greek amphora at the beginning of this chapter. The appreciation for muscular, athletic torsos remains consistent, as does the preference for lack of body hair. Because contemporary American society rejects homosexuality for the most part, it is not surprising that what is definitively male, the upper body and genitalia, is exaggerated to the same degree as figures in erotic vase painting. Representations of the female body in contemporary mass-media reflect the same exaggerated features; large breasts, small waists, and round, curvaceous hips are prominent features in advertisements containing female models.

The importance of an aesthetically pleasing, athletic physique for a Greek male is illustrated in fig. 24 below. The man on the far left of the vase is presumably older than the second male figure as indicated by the presence of his beard, and he is thin and lacking muscle compared to the male youth pictured with him. The woman he is pursuing is depicted in the act of shunning him, and Dover argues that she does so because of his inferior appearance (Dover 1978, 91). The features of both female figures on the vase recall Dover's earlier commentary regarding the masculine appearance of women; they

both possess muscular abdomens, and the stylistic rendering of their breasts makes them not immediately recognizable as such. Finally, the genitalia of the male youth are proportionate rather than exceptionally large. As previously mentioned, bulging genitals were considered a feature of ugliness rather than an aesthetically pleasing attribute, as the examples of the satyrs illustrate.

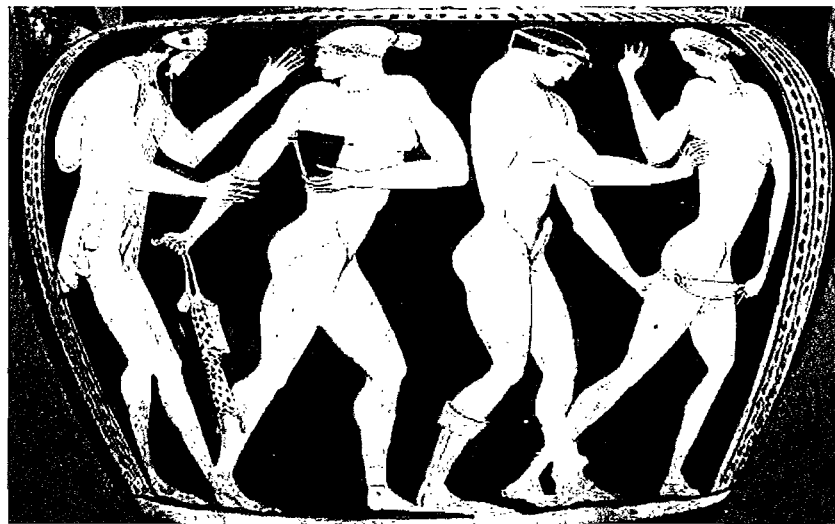


Fig. 27. Red-figure amphora  
( <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image> )

Sex in contemporary American culture is not seen as a starting point on the path of intellectual enlightenment, but rather a measure of superior social skill. One only needs to read junk email advertisements, otherwise known as “spam,” which advertise sexual enhancement drugs such as “Viagra,” as well as advertisements promising to significantly increase penis size for the intent of “satisfying her” in order to understand the significance of sex and sexual performance in American culture, particularly as it pertains to men. Men who are reputed to have large sexual appetites and strong sexual

prowess are revered rather than reviled, and are described by terms such as “stud” and “player,” both of which are complimentary rather than denigrating. Such terms are in stark opposition to the label of *hubristes*, bestowed on Greek men whose sexual appetites were stronger than what was deemed socially acceptable. The opposite is true in contemporary American popular culture. Virility and sexual appetite is the hallmark of the ideal man, not the mark of a degenerative character. Therefore, large genitalia function in advertising and the mass-media to convey the ideal man (and the ideal product for the ideal man), rather than a depiction of undesirable, animalistic, or licentious character, as is the case with the sexually insatiable satyrs.

Contemporary American men who display strong sexual appetites are perceived as successful in many ways besides those pertaining to sexual pursuit. “In a heterosexual society a young man is not merely excused by his peers and elders if he pursues women with intent to seduce; if it is believed that he has been successful, he is envied by most of his peers and elders and openly admired by many” (Dover 1978, 88). The images found in erotic vase painting are consistent with the social attitudes of ancient Greece regarding acceptable male sexual behavior, as images found in advertising and the mass media are consistent with contemporary American social attitudes concerning the same. Men in American society are expected to be the pursuers rather than the objects of pursuit, and powerfully-muscled models are selected because they visually convey their ability to succeed in sexual conquest. Their bulging genitalia visually confirm the current American sentiment that “size matters” and add to their “potent” appearance. Advertisers in contemporary American mass-media now take into account the preferences of women in



order to include them as a target consumer group; this factor only adds further impetus to depict men as sexually potent by selecting those who are endowed with both physical strength and large genitalia, confirming their ability to “satisfy” their conquests.

However, according to the rules and norms governing the *erastes-eromenos* relationship, sexual satisfaction alone was not considered an adequate pay-off for securing the affections of a free-born male Greek youth. Older males were expected to provide intellectual, philosophical betterment for the youths who accepted their sexual advances, ultimately contributing to their increased social standing and societal regard, as both the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* suggest.

## CHAPTER III

### FACELESS: VERNACULAR EXPRESSIONS OF GENDER

#### The Male Figure in Monuments and the Mass-Media

Though the male *kouros* of Ancient Greece stood nude (as fig. six and seven of the previous chapter illustrate), his female counterpart, the *kore*, always appeared clothed. Both performed the same function, however, in that they were mostly votive or funerary.<sup>9</sup> As the distance from the ancient world to the present is travelled, the dichotomy of clothed female/naked male gradually reverses: “Art historians have identified the nineteenth century as the era in which the female nude became the dominant vision of nudity. The practice of linking the female with nudity in order to embody abstract notions of ideal was a strong cultural current of the time” (Thomas 2003, 183). Thomas examines vernacular representations of males and females beginning with cemetery statuary and ending with lawn art and the omni-present *Barbie* doll and *G.I. Joe* action figure. Thomas identifies a tendency for representations of females in cemetery statuary to be “faceless” depictions of “female as mourner,” that is, the stylized symbol of female as passive, sexualized, and nurturing, often nude or partially draped, and often with exposed breasts. Thomas contrasts these representations of females with the individualistic and more accurate (except in the case of genitalia) representations of male statuary erected as grave monuments. Male cemetery statuary often depicts the likeness

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<sup>9</sup> See both Hurwit and Gardner’s *Art Through The Ages*.

of the individual whose grave it marks, and is almost always fully clothed, though lacking the tell-tale genital “bulge” (Thomas 2003, 193).



Fig. 28. *Lady of Auxerre kore* (650–625 BCE).  
(<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image>)

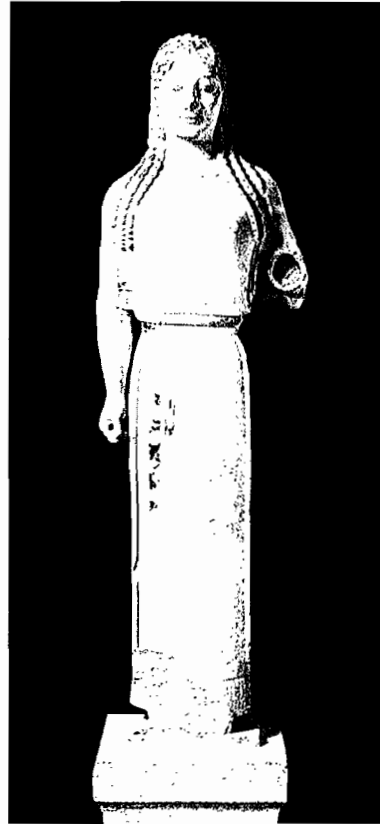


Fig. 29. *Peplos Kore* from Acropolis (530 BCE)  
(<http://www.hartzler.org/cc307/archaic/images/061.jpg>)

Thomas identifies a unifying theme in all the art forms she examines—sexualized representations of the female body:

All three forms discussed in this book evince patterns that downplay male sexuality but emphasize female sensuality. In cemeteries, statues of males lack erotic features to the point of the omission of the genitals. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the erotic female body is often accentuated through nudity, partial nudity, or form-revealing drapery. (Thomas 2003, 193)

In cemetery statuary and male action figures, machismo and aggression are often conveyed through statues of soldiers and their weapons and the impossibly heavily muscled physiques of male action figures. Representations of males in yard art did not necessarily follow this paradigm: “At (almost literally) the grass-roots level, yard art provides an alternative to these narrow and stereotypical constructions of the masculine” (Thomas 2003, 192). Yard art lends itself to more individualistic representations of gender because it places the ability to emphasize or de-emphasize aspects of the body traditionally associated with either gender into the hands of the “folk” themselves. Similarly, what makes mass-produced objects like Barbie or the Attic vases of Chapter II folkloric is the way people use them and incorporate them into their identities.

In gendered representations of males and females in yard art, as observed by Thomas, many examples diverge from the aesthetic principles that govern high art. The same essentialist themes regarding gender are often still present, despite the flexibility of the medium. How the “folk” choose to represent gender often coincides with historically essentialist notions of male and female identity, though it is not always congruent with current social and political sentiment. Representations of women in cemetery statuary are often constructed for the male gaze and according to aesthetic principles that govern gender representations in high art. Yard art depictions of males and females, including cutouts of elderly women bending over (a.k.a. “granny fannies”) and cement statues of little boys peeing often express the same essentialist notions of male and female, but diverge from cemetery statuary in that they are constructed with the aesthetic gaze of the folk, or non-elite, in mind (Thomas 2003, 109). Though yard art often adhered to the

same themes as cemetery statuary concerning representations of the female form, many examples diverged from it as well: “The customs and narratives surrounding stock images of yard art figures of women do not usually blatantly eroticize them. Still, sexuality is an aspect of many images” (Thomas 2003, 193). Thomas also notes that, though the genitals of a male may be indirectly inferred from the “peeing boy” statues and cutouts, such representations do not feature adult men and are similarly constructed to convey playfulness and mischief rather than sexuality.

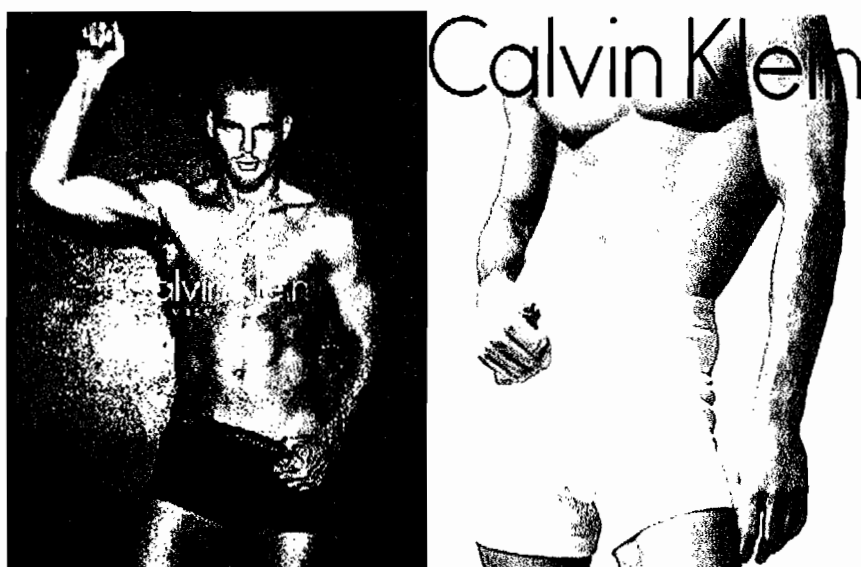
The pervasive notion of “woman as object of the male gaze” is apparent in the mass-media’s depiction of the female form in everything from advertisements for jeans to liquor commercials. Though cosmetics have existed throughout antiquity, the ability of the mass-media to saturate the American public with images of women who flawlessly meet popular aesthetic criteria has given the cosmetic industry an unparalleled edge. Classical Greek and Latin writers from Ovid to Xenophon authored commentary on the subject of women’s use of cosmetics, and countless medieval texts such as the *Proverbia Quae Dicuntur Super Natura Feminarum* and *Il Corbaccio* echoed the same theme in scathing critiques of women’s vanity and the use of cosmetics. Misogynist rhetoric ceaselessly ridiculing women’s so-called vanity and over-extensive efforts to modify their appearance have persisted throughout the centuries, many of them simultaneously denigrating women who fail to live up to the very same aesthetic standards they criticize as excessively vain. Although the pressure for men to conform to aesthetic ideals of beauty present in every culture has also existed throughout antiquity, the potential for validation and the building of self-worth based on something other than physical

appearance has also been a constant. A major change has occurred in the last decade: campaigns from a number of different brands of cosmetics are now geared towards pitching product lines developed specifically for men, and many such as Nivea and Clinique have been largely successful. Such ads use similar strategies as ads selling women's products, and feature male models who meet the corresponding standards of aesthetic beauty as their female counterparts.

Susan Bordo analyzes the male body in advertising and other popular media such as major Hollywood films. She compares images of male models in underwear and fashion advertisements, highlighting conventions appearing over and over again as well as many notable exceptions. Jon Berger's formula of "men act and women appear" (Berger 1977, 45) is one such convention Bordo finds again and again, particularly in underwear advertisements. She notes that in many such advertisements, men appear posed as though on the verge of action, looking directly into the camera in a direct and often challenging manner, as though compensating for the apparent vulnerability caused by their state of undress (Bordo 1999, 27-30). In the famous Calvin Klein underwear ads, a completely different representation of the male body began to emerge in advertising and featured men whose bodies were posed in an openly inviting and often times submissive posture rather than the standard aggressive, "poised for action" stance (Bordo 1999, 27-30).

The advertisements below for Calvin Klein underwear have much in common with Bordo's observations and many photos in this section of men from MySpace. The men in fig. 31, 33, and 36 all display similar poses as the models above. Like the model

on the left, the men in fig. 33 and 36 reveal more of their abdominal and pelvic areas by pushing their waistbands lower, whereas other men opt for the more subtle pose of the model on the right, as fig. 31 illustrates. The men on MySpace whose pages I will discuss are advertising themselves to potential mates as their chosen motive of “dating” suggest.



**Fig. 30. Calvin Klein advertisements**  
(<http://www.origo.hu/i/0412/20041223calvinkle.jpg>)

The majority of men who choose to represent themselves with nude or partially nude photos are presenting the same portions of the male body displayed in commercial advertising in order to demonstrate their physical desirability. But if these men have choose photos that display the same ideally masculine features previously mentioned, does the text they choose to employ serve the same function? Which characteristics do these men most commonly describe using written language? In other words, are the qualities these men choose to highlight in descriptive text primarily physical ones, or are

they more individualistic, describing non-physical characteristics such as beliefs and interests?

Objectification of the body based on what is culturally dictated as aesthetically desirable, yet almost unachievable, is becoming an equal-opportunity endeavor for men and women. Clearly, the idea that essentialist perceptions of gender and aesthetic beauty have a profound effect on an individual's body consciousness in general is not new. But do vernacular representations of sex and gender mirror this trend? Citing Bourdieu, Thomas notes that when an object is displayed in a museum and designed according to the aesthetic principles of high art, its prior functions are deemphasized and it becomes pure form; "popular" and "folk" art are viewed as doing the opposite (Thomas 2003, 109). Thomas examines not only the images themselves, but the legends, stories, variations of display, and the way individuals actually engage mass-produced action figures and Barbie dolls in play. These elements comprise the folkloric aspects of these "popular" aesthetic forms of art and distinguish them from high art. Such a contrast is observable when comparing yard art and cemetery statuary. Will folkloric representations of the gendered body such as self-portraits of individuals, specifically, male individuals who are conscious of a need to express their sexuality through images featuring their own bodies, reflect essentialist perceptions of gender?

### The Men of MySpace

Throughout the last thirty years, a dynamic that casts men in the same objectified, symbolic role of women as noted by Thomas has emerged. Men have increasingly been



featured in the mass-media as sexual objects for both the male and female gaze, and have become targets for the same industries that have capitalized on the desires of women to meet popular aesthetic standards of female beauty. The amount of money men spend on cosmetic surgery in the U.S. has tripled since 1970, and the amount of money they spend on gym membership fees and penis enhancement, including drugs like the popular, orally administered *Viagra*, has reached an all-time high, as has the use of illicit substances such as anabolic steroids. Such figures are an indication of the growing market value of the male body (Harrison, Pope, and Olivardia 2000, 54). In the 1960s, all-male strip shows for female audiences were virtually non-existent. The inception of Chippendales, one of the most famous male strip shows, did not occur until 1978 (Harrison, Pope, and Olivardia, 54). Circulation of *Playgirl* magazine only predates Chippendales by five years, hitting the stands in 1973 (Harrison, Pope, and Olivardia 2000, 47).

The last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked the advent of a booming trade in cosmetic surgery, which offered even greater means of modifying appearance to conform to the aesthetic standards of American popular culture. Now, with the proliferation of mass-media and advertising, eating disorders and muscle dysmorphia among men and boys abound. The authors of *The Adonis Complex* define muscle dysmorphia as “an excessive preoccupation with body size and muscularity. The body image distortions of men with ‘muscle dysmorphia’ are strikingly analogous to those of women (and some men) with anorexia nervosa” (Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia 2000, 10). These authors posit that, as opportunities for women to engage in activities historically denied to them have increased significantly since the 1900s, men are left with their bodies as a defining

source of masculinity. Quoting James Gillett and Philip White, they further suggest that “the desirability of a ‘hypermasculine’ body and the recent explosion of bodybuilding may be rooted in the growing ‘threat to male privilege’ caused by the ascendancy of women.” (Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia, 51) In other words, as feminism and women’s presence in the labor force increased, so did instances of male body dysmorphia. Perhaps most troubling of all is that the authors use the same argument to account for the increase in domestic abuse. Men are reacting to the loss of privilege and subsequent gender identity crisis by abusing the women they live with (Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia, 51-52). They also make the point that social awareness of eating disorders in women has given victims a voice with which to speak, as well as support through the acknowledgement that they are not alone. However, because eating disorders are viewed as “women’s diseases,” open acknowledgement of muscle dysmorphia by male victims can actually be an additional threat to masculine identity. No “safe place” yet exists for discourse on male eating disorders and muscle dysmorphia to begin and thereby raise social awareness.

An argument such as the one above concerning women’s ascendancy and the subsequent “threat to male privilege” is troubling for two reasons. First, female equality is viewed as a “cause” of both domestic violence and male body dysmorphia in that it is somehow responsible for the diminution of opportunities for expressing masculine identity, a fallacy of *cum hoc ergo propter hoc* (mistaking correlation for causation). Secondly, it interprets the equalizing of social privilege between men and women as a “threat” to the previous structure which favored males almost exclusively. However,

female equality grants women a share of social privilege equal to, not greater than that of men, and it is therefore unclear how equality threatens any aspects of male identity except those based on beliefs concerning the superiority of one sex over the other. With regard to the increase in male body dysmorphia, Susan Bordo argues that consumer capitalism is the culprit rather than sexual equality:

I, however, tend to see consumer capitalism rather than women's expectations or proclivities as the true motor driving male concern with appearance. Calvin [Klein] gave us those muscled men in underwear. Then the cosmetics, diet, exercise, and surgery industries elbowed in, providing the means for everyone to develop that great Soloflex body. After all, why should they restrict themselves to female markets if they can convince men that their looks need constant improvement too? (Bordo 1999, 220)

Though women have always been the target audience for the cosmetic and fashion industries as previously noted, before they had the ability to earn their own livings, they depended upon men to provide economic resources in order to purchase such products. Now, both sexes have earning power, and both, of course, have bodies. Why indeed would marketers not take advantage of such an increase in potential profits? The message to today's career woman is clear: education and success are not enough. She must have a beautiful body to match, regardless of what she now has to offer in the way of economic and intellectual contribution.

A study of female body image conducted by a group of investigators in Canada compared the dimensions of women in *Playboy* magazine centerfolds from 1959 to 1979, and demonstrated that models had been growing steadily thinner over the years (Harrison, Pope, and Olivardia 2000, 46). Richard Leit adopted the same methodology and compared the dimensions of men featured in *Playgirl* magazine centerfolds from

1973 through 1998. His research indicates that, just as their female counterparts have been growing thinner, men in *Playgirl* had become increasingly more muscular: “Putting this in more specific terms, the average *Playgirl* centerfold man has *shed about 12 pounds of fat, while putting on approximately 27 pounds of muscle* over the last twenty-five years!” (authors’ own emphasis) (Harrison, Pope, and Olivardia 2000, 47). But is this fairly recent trend observable in the way men choose to represent themselves on an individual, vernacular level, or is this a mass-media-fabricated ideal found only in advertisements and pornographic magazines? Are men internalizing these “beefed up” images just as so many women have internalized the images of ultra-thin supermodels? The hyper-masculine, “muscle as armor” aesthetic identified by Thomas in male action figures is not expressed in high art, yet it governs mass-produced objects like G.I Joe. The same is true of Barbie and her ultra-thin, “large breasted nascent physique;” the equivalent is simply not the norm in representations of the female form in high art. It is therefore a popular folk aesthetic governed by principles with wide appeal and propagated through mass-produced objects and images circulated through the mass-media.

Bordo notes the findings of a survey aimed at male college undergraduates and their perceptions of their bodies:

Last year, I read a survey that reported that 90 percent of male undergraduates believe that they are not muscular enough. That sent warning bells clanging in my mind, and sure enough, there’s now a medical category for “muscle dysmorphia” (or “bigorexia,” as it’s actually sometimes called!)...Researchers are “explaining” bigorexia in the same dumb way they’ve tended to approach women’s disorders—as a combination of bad biochemistry and “triggering events,” such as being picked on. They just don’t seem to understand that bigorexia—like anorexia—

only blooms in a very particular cultural soil. Not even the ancient Greeks—who revered athletic bodies and scorned weaklings, but also advised moderation in all things—produced ‘muscle dysmorphics’...Anorexia and bigorexia, like so many contemporary disorders, are diseases of a culture that doesn’t know when to stop. (Bordo 1999, 221)

The ancient Greeks, as discussed in Chapter II, were obsessed with moderation and self-control, not bodies. The “particular cultural soil” Bordo refers to above simply did not exist in the ancient world. Again, the concept of hubris illustrated by the discussion of *Lysias III* in Chapter II is crucial for understanding the ancient Greeks’ attitude toward those who were unable to control their appetites, and it is a concept, as Bordo points out, altogether absent from American culture—a culture “without limits.” How will the images of American men, raised in such “particular” cultural soil, reflect the preoccupation with pushing the limits of the body? Websites such as MySpace.com are interesting and insightful places to search for the answer to such a question.

In order to conduct research that would focus on the aesthetic principles most commonly observable in the way men choose to represent their bodies, my examination of MySpace pages suggests that this trend is indeed observable in the way many men choose to consciously present themselves for both the female gaze and in competition with other males. I chose to examine heterosexual males exclusively because masculinity is more narrowly defined among this group than homosexual men. As discussed in Chapter Two, masculinity in the ancient world was defined according to multiple constructs rather than a rigid definition dependent on object choice. The same applies to contemporary homosexual constructs of masculinity in which, like the ancient world, specific sexual acts may define identity, such as “tops” (men who may anally penetrate

their partners but do not allow themselves to be penetrated) and “bottoms” (men who allow themselves to be anally penetrated but do not penetrate others). Though definitions of masculinity for contemporary heterosexual men in the U.S. may be expressed through several channels (e.g. wealth, status, and occupation), the sexual dynamic is very important. Unlike the men of ancient Greece, heterosexual men in America do not have an established role in which age or status dictates that they are the pursued rather than the pursuers. Although significantly more leeway now exists for women in contemporary America to initiate the role of sexual aggressor and pursuer, widely acknowledged social conventions such as those governing the *erastes-eromenos* courtship are not evident for women who choose this role and the men they seek to court.

Myspace.com is free to join and is accessible to citizens of the US and the international community on the whole, fourteen years of age or older. It consists of members of both sexes, and all sexual orientations. Members have the option of specifying their age, sex, sexual orientation (e.g. “straight”, “gay”, “bi”, and “not sure”), motive for joining (e.g., “friends,” “dating,” “serious relationships,” and “networking”), and status of romantic availability (e.g. “married,” “single,” “in a relationship,” and “swinger”). Each member has a personalized web page on the site including a photo index of unlimited photos of the member’s choosing, one of which is selected to be the “primary photo” and appears in search results, emails sent to other members, and featured on the member’s page. The pages are constructed using .html code and can be personalized by members as much or as little as they desire. The site does not allow nudity in images posted with .html or in photos included in the photo index. However,

supervision and moderation of the site when I began my research was minimal, and nude photos were often included despite their prohibition. Since the purchasing of MySpace by News Corp in 2005, supervision of photo content is more effective, and a clickable feature allowing members to “report inappropriate content” now appears below each photo members post in their indices.

Members also have the option of making their photo indices “private,” meaning only those who are added as “friends” by the member may view it. Non-members may browse through the site using search parameters they specify such as sex, age, and romantic availability. Full access to photo indices is restricted to members only. When individuals become members of MySpace, they may view the photo indices of any member they choose unless they are set to “private.” Members may also contact other members through email or instant messenger conversations. In addition to the ability for members to post images on their pages with .html, they also have the option of filling in sections such as “about me” and “who I’d like to meet” with descriptive text concerning personal preferences, beliefs, and interests. Members also have the option of writing in web logs or “blogs” on any topic they desire. Blogs are accessed through member’s pages, although members do have the option of restricting readership from other members not on their friends list, or friends they have not specified as “preferred readers.”

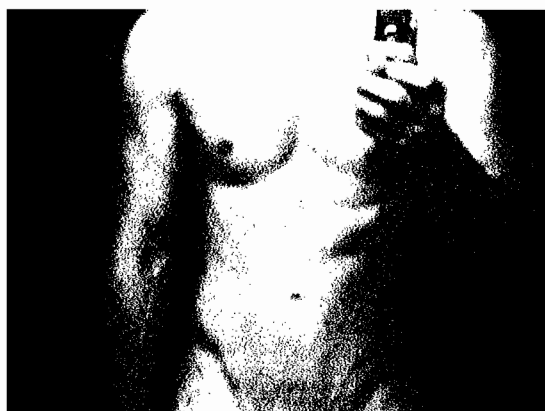
I chose to examine self-representation as expressed through two mediums: text and visual imagery. I examined both mediums and how they were utilized by men in the US who identified themselves as “straight” between the ages of eighteen and thirty, and

who expressed their motives for joining the site as “dating” and/or “serious relationships.” I compared the content of the photos they chose to represent themselves with the descriptive text they chose to employ. In addition to examining text and photos posted on MySpace, I also distributed a short survey aimed at gathering additional insight into what criteria men use to determine which pictures to post of themselves, and what they felt women on MySpace wanted to see from male members in terms of both text and photos. I entered the aforementioned parameters into a search, narrowing the results to include only individuals residing in the United States. The search yielded over 3000 pages of heterosexual male users, out of which I examined the first 300 pages, with ten results per page. As Thomas observed, representations of the gendered body at the “grass-roots” level allow more latitude for individual expression. Would images on a website such as MySpace, because they are chosen according to the tastes and preferences of individuals at a grass-roots level, display stereotypical constructions of masculinity, or would many of them diverge from representations of machismo and aggressive hyper-masculinity?

Of the 3000 photos I examined in search results, approximately one in five were shirtless and partially nude (usually from the waist up) with strategic areas hidden from view either by draping or by angling away from the camera. Areas featured in partially nude shots were usually the torso, abdomen, and upper body, the same areas most frequently emphasized by advertising that utilizes male models such as the images featured on page 44 of Chapter II. Because male musculature is naturally more densely concentrated in the upper body, the shoulders, upper arms, and abdomen are also the



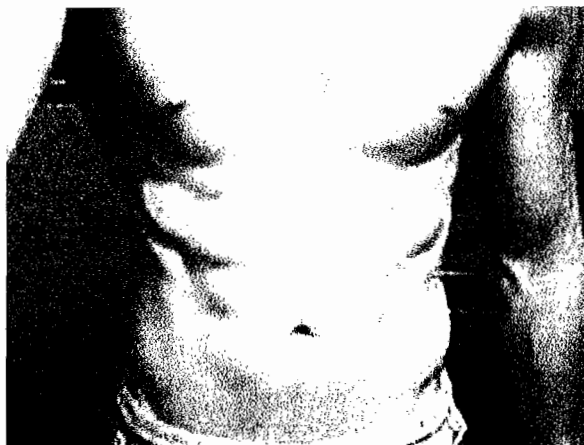
areas where the effects of steroid use are most visible (Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia 2000, 53). The pictures often depict individuals from the chin and below, eliminating the face from view altogether, as the images below illustrate. Men who chose to feature themselves in faceless photos often had additional pictures consisting of face shots in their indices, but it is important to note that they chose faceless photos as their primary image to appear in search results, on their pages, and on emails to other members. Though Thomas' female cemetery statues were faceless in the sense that they were symbolic, stylized objects, the men in the photos above were faceless by conscious choice, and the portions of their bodies they chose to feature most often were those that conventionally symbolize masculinity in high art. Much like breasts are a feature commonly exposed and enhanced to symbolically represent femininity, men depict themselves with the broad shoulders and defined abdominal muscles (commonly referred to as the "six pack") of the male physique to represent what is ideally masculine.



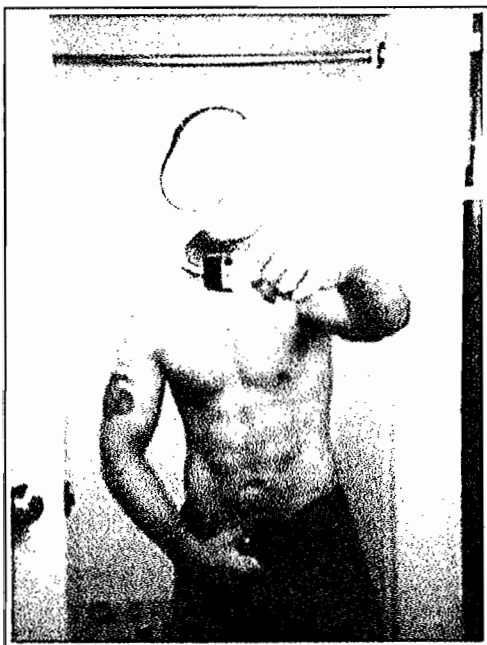
**Fig. 31. 18 year-old male**



**Fig. 32. 19 year-old male**



**Fig. 33. 24 year-old male**



**Fig. 34. 21 year-old male**



**Fig. 35. 22 year-old male**

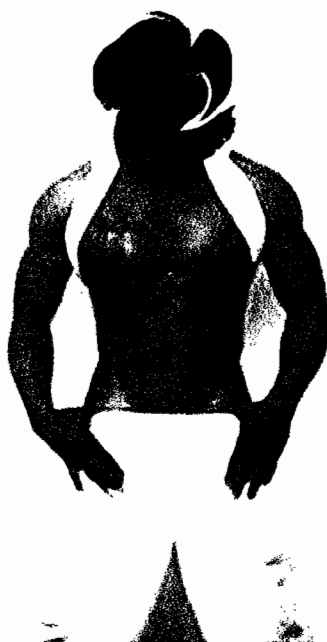


Fig. 36. 24 year-old male



Fig. 37. 23 year-old male



Fig. 38. 21 year-old male



Fig. 39. 23 year-old male



Fig. 40. 21 year-old male

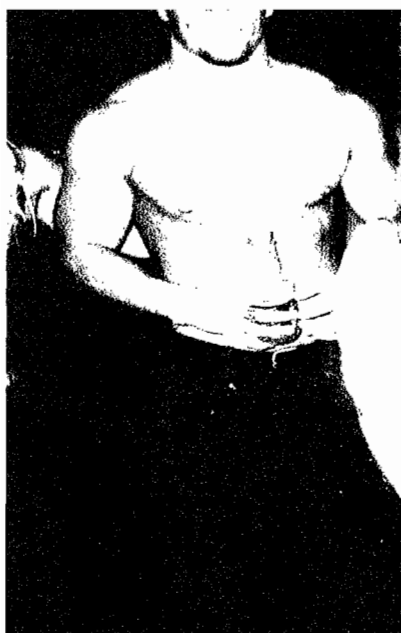


Fig. 41. 26 year-old male



Fig. 42. 22 year-old male



**Fig. 43. 23 year-old male**



**Fig. 44. 24 year-old male**

Of the men who chose to feature themselves nude or partially nude yet showed their faces in primary photos, the same features (torso, abdomen, and upper body) were emphasized in the photos of their faceless counterparts. The similarities between the two categories of partially nude photos, the areas of the body featured, and the manner in which they were displayed suggest that all of these members are consciously conforming to specific aesthetic criteria. A few exceptions to these commonly featured areas of the body include the back and buttocks, although these types of photographs are rare by comparison. If showing off muscles is the main goal of the men in the photos above, a

photo taken from the rear reveals far less than the obvious muscles of the chest, abdominals, and shoulders. In the example below, the subject of the photo, a twenty-one year-old male who chose a sexual innuendo for his screen name, is featured fully nude and with only the back of his head visible. Though he is clearly interested in conveying his sexuality, the photo does not seem to suggest a preoccupation with emphasizing his muscles, possibly one reason why he was not adverse to a rearview photo. This user



**Fig. 45. 21 year-old male**

specified his sexual orientation as “straight,” but it can be argued that homoerotic implications may also be evident.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Baym acknowledges that most scholars of computer-mediated communication argue that conversational cues in textual format are reduced to status, appearance, identity, and gender, resulting in general anonymity (Baym 1999, 167). In the following samples of text taken from individual pages, many of the conversational cues above are repeatedly displayed in members’ self-descriptions (all entries in original format with no attempts to edit content):

**Ex. 1:** You should know i'm 5'11 170 lbs athletic and built. I'm half Russian and Italain I was just recently seperated from a relatonship that lasted 4 years. I'm a very funny and outgoing person i love the outdoors, i also like to travel, shop and dine. So you could pretty much put it together and say i'm down for anything. (23 year-old male)

**Ex. 2:** I'm 20, 5'8 with a muscular build. I'm tan as you can see. I have greenish blue eyes and brown hair. I'm currently a college student on weekdays, major is

personal trainer. I like to go clubbin and chill at house parties, all the time. I'm a nightlife person. Some of my hobbies are bodybuilding, music, and chillin with friends. I'm easy going and fun to be around. *(20 year-old male)*

In the examples above, both men reiterate their physical attributes with text but include other identifiers such as ethnic heritage and personal hobbies. Unlike the photo index, space for text is not limited. Although members may only post a limited number of photos, they can include as much text as they desire. However, though many individuals may choose to elaborate extensively about their interests and identity, one or more of the conventions noted above are frequently employed.

The following example illustrates the extent to which some users choose to utilize text in order to express the information they feel is most pertinent for others to understand them (entry is recorded in its original format with no attempt to edit content):

Hellow, my name is T\*\*\*\*. All i have to say is.....I'm just T.I.@. at all times in every situatiion and in every surcumstance. I'm not one of those people that is about to smile in your face and talk behind you behind your back. When i meet new people i'm positive and i give those beings respect just like respect should be given and it should be earned!" Life is too short!" My goal is to live life to the fullest enjoy myself but yet be diligent with my academics and steadily rise in the work force. I feel that education is the key to success in life expecially with my ethnic background. Concurrently, i am studying Business Administration, Econimics, and Business Law. My two majors r Bussi and Econ and my minor is the "Law."My altimate goal in life to to "get rich or die trying!" I feel this way because when u r raised with nothing then achive something just to loose it. U become haungry and u try to presue happiness, warmth, or any means of satisfation through haunger. I'm just seeking the American dream that is all."I'm one of those "biggas"( African American who participates in extreme sports:skydive, bunjijumping, Hanggliging, and other fun and funky activities!) Although it may seem that i am a cruel person with a dark and blach heart i'm really a nice person just get to know me and it return u will not be disapointed in the result. I just have a hard time trusting people thats all...(22 year-old male)

The man who posted the above text chose to feature himself shirtless in his primary photo. However, he is also playing an outdoor sport in the photo, providing context for his shirtless appearance and making it apparent he did not take the photo himself. Context seems to be important to this individual in both his photos and his “about me” section. He makes no mention of his physical attributes, and chooses instead to describe his goals and accomplishments in his “about me” section. He lists his hobbies, educational experience, and “ethnic background,” although he does not specify what it is. He may feel such a specification is not necessary if he considers his ethnicity self evident from his photos.

### What the Men Say: Questions and Answers

In this section I will examine the survey answers of the male respondents in order to establish a clearer idea of how they select the information they choose to present in photos and text. It was often necessary to establish some type of rapport with respondents in addition to the initial email asking for their participation in the survey. MySpace’s huge membership and easy accessibility make it a prime site for “spammers” and “phishers,” individuals who steal passwords and send junk or “spam” mail to members in an attempt to direct them to other websites, some of which are pornographic in nature. Spam emails often appear to be sent by an individual (usually female) interested in conversing with a member, and may contain flirtatious or sexually suggestive language. Though I did not investigate whether one sex receives spam messages of this nature more frequently than the other, anecdotal accounts seem to suggest men are more often targets for this type of spam mail. For this reason, several men were skeptical of my initial email



and assumed I was a spammer because the message came unsolicited from an unfamiliar female.

Since it was necessary to create rapport with several individual respondents in order to assure them I was not a spammer, survey answers are often very informal and sometimes describe information in a way that suggests it is self evident to the reader. One possible explanation for this is that, unlike a completely anonymous survey, establishing familiarity with respondents may have caused them to reply as though they were speaking directly to me instead of answering an anonymous questionnaire with no possibility of feedback or prior knowledge on the part of the researcher. It was necessary to exchange several emails with some of the respondents both before and after they completed the survey, whereas some respondents participated immediately and initiated no further correspondence in addition to their answers to the survey questions. The varied amount of communication on my part with each respondent also likely affected the manner in which they responded to the questions. Those who exchanged more than one email with me might have felt a stronger sense of personal trust and therefore elaborated more freely in their answers to the survey questions.

In addition to reasons directly related to the online environment of MySpace itself, establishing rapport with participants is an integral feature of folklore fieldwork. Several folklorists, particularly those who collect oral narratives from individuals who speak about experiences and beliefs in which they have much personal investment, reject the researcher/subject paradigm in favor of an approach that treats those who participate in folkloric research as the “experts.” Barre Toelken explains this approach in detail:

Throughout this [fieldwork] process, it is easy to forget that in folklore—in ongoing tradition itself—it is the tradition-bearer, not the collector, archivist, or scholar who remains the important person. Notice how the term collector and informant suggest a certain kind of one-way relationship: one takes and the other gives... Since folklore is made up of the expressions most closely related to personal identity within a close group, its possessors do not simply throw it up on command. Folks do not give out family recipes to just anyone, do not share songs with people whose reactions might be hurtful, contemptuous, or careless. (Toelken 1996, 348)

As noted previously, though MySpace is a public website, emails exchanged between users are private correspondence. The survey I distributed deals with what men consider important indicators of status and how they display them to create a public identity in a large group rather than a personal identity in a close group, as Toelken describes above. Regardless, responding to the survey questions in private email correspondence allowed some men to relate highly personal experiences in addition to their answers, as the following survey answers from a 20 year-old male illustrate (entry is recorded in its original format with no attempt to edit content):

well in regards to your first question i chose these pic's of myself because that is the only pictures of me that i have on my computer and i have to represent my team the braves as much and as best that i can. i think these pictures say that i am a fan of the braves and that i dress like a thug... what do you feel these pictures say about me? I think women most want to see hot guys on myspace because a guy my size has a very hard time getting women to look my way other then to tell me to move or make fun of me.... however nice and loyal of a guy i am the women on here or face to face dont care about how sweet, loyal, and caring a guy is they are to shallow to see that a guy like me would make any women happy because i am not a dick who is just going to trample a womens heart because i have feelings. I think what makes a man successful in life is having a family a job and a life that shows he is happy and has done anything possible to make his family happy regardless of where he works and what he drives and how much money he makes! Americans have become so shallow that they forgot what family and love for one another means! to tell you the truth i dont know what people expect from men... but i expect men to be hard working, accepting of

women in the structure of the society and to be respectful of his fellow man and women!

Many of the above answers are of a highly personal nature; the respondent not only addresses the topics of the questions, but also shares his opinion of situations he considers directly related to them, such as women's expectations of men and American cultural norms. He specifically states that he feels it is difficult for a man of his "size" to garner anything but negative attention from women. He also states that he believes most women want to see "hot" men on MySpace. These two statements suggest that he believes his body does not meet current aesthetic standards, and that he believes those standards are important to the majority of women.

The next two surveys cited are in a slightly different format and focus more directly on the men's perceptions of women's expectations of them, rather than the more general category of society as a whole. Two individuals I approached answered surveys with different wording for question five. Rather than asking, "What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)", question five on these two surveys asks, "What do you think makes men seem successful to women." The first of two respondents who answered the survey with the alternate version of question five is a 27 year-old male (all entries are unedited and appear in their original format):

**1).What made you choose this picture of yourself?**

a) I chose this pic because it doesn't show me... it shows a semi-flattering back view, which is just enough to tease without showing a damn thing about me. No six pack in the bathroom mirror douchebag shots thank you! Actually on facebook i used this picture while joining the "People with shirtless pics on facebook are huge douchebags" group - couldn't pass up the irony :p



ass ex boyfriend and swearing

Fig. 46. 27 year-old male

b) after wearing lingerie over rock jeans at the last blacklight party (and to a country bar in the middle of the night), i couldn't pass up this pic for a bit. You cross elements of outrageousness with the outfit, my excessive jewelry... my bleary drunk eyes and the "fuck-off" middle finger to the camera - which basically sums me up as a drunk.

## **2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

a) that I prefer lakes? i mean i'm half naked and you can see the water behind me. or that i'm vain since i'm showing my bare back? or artistic since it's black and white (disclaimer: B&W is the poor man's definition of "art" - take any mediocre shot, strip the color and suddenly everyone assumes you are an "artist". bleh)

b) that i'm an out of control rock/punk band member, or a transvestite? (neither is true)

## **3).What do you think most women look for in men's profiles on MySpace?**

I honestly have no idea. Assuming the people browsing your profile are not totally random but maybe new acquaintances... then they are probably making sure you don't appear to be a total man whore, and thus might be safe to "Get to know". Or perhaps they look for some sense

of financial stability after finally getting over their broke

ass ex boyfriend and swearing off deadbeats forever. I

make sure to offer no such financial status, or idea of what I do. I'd rather girls assume I'm just a random fun guy than a successful "target."

## **4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture? What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?**

Depends on who you ask of course. The "average" middle class american? Probably the wife, kids, baseball practice, perhaps a solid 401k. The more well-off? Nice cars, real estate, a trophy wife. My salary would blow some people away, yet not even phase others - it's all relative.

I don't think a guy should have to accomplish anything in particular to have a "successful" life. To suggest someone is a failure for NOT doing X or Y in his life seems ridiculous to me.

Do I consider myself successful though? Not really. I succeed a lot, but until I even know what I want out of life, how can i be successful?

**5).What do you think makes men seem successful in women's eyes?**

Duh. Money! Wait, money, and having other girls like him too. No one wants the guy no one else wants. Or maybe that's just Houston girls. So, here's the cocktail for impressing Houston girls (broad and most likely incorrect generalities will follow):

- 1) Dress Fashionably - this will suggest you aren't totally clueless and can be presentable in public
- 2) Know/Pretend-to-know lots of people when you go out. This says "other people like him, so it's ok for me to like him too".
- 3) Treat girls poorly - they like that.
- 4) Own/Borrow a nice car. This is more important than a house, because you don't drive a house to the clubs where everyone will see you. Besides, if you get her to come back you can always say you are just crashing at your friend's dumpy apartment while your mansion is being remodeled.

The above respondent's answers are at times humorous, and at others brutally honest. Many involve seemingly tongue-in-cheek allusions to the importance of outward indicators of status and affluence. He discusses some of these indicators in terms of how they are conventionally displayed on MySpace. In his answer to question one he refers to the popular "bathroom mirror shot" illustrated in a number of photos in the previous section. In his answer to question five he discusses dating conventions in the "real world" in terms of well-known stereotypes concerning what impresses women, and it is possible he employs them as devices to signify a sarcastic critique rather than belief in their validity. The respondent's answer to question three also suggests he is aware that indications of successful occupational and financial status could mark him as a "target" for women. He indicates that he intentionally leaves such details out of his profile to avoid attention from women searching for men who meet specific financial criteria. Yet, he also indicates he is aware that the photo he has chosen for his primary picture is

flattering, and the photo itself reveals enough of his shoulders, laterals, and triceps to conclude he has a muscular physique. His choice of photo suggests that, although he is not interested in conveying financial indicators of status to potential partners, he is not averse to displaying his status in terms of physical appearance.

The second respondent who answered the survey with the different version of question five is a 19 year-old male (entry in its original format with no attempts to edit content):

**1).What made you choose this picture of yourself?**

I actually specifically took it for the purpose of myspace, as many "myspace whores" do, idunno, I just really enjoy taking pictures of myself that look good, because I dont consider myself very photogenic. I picked to make this picture my default because it shows off my stomach, which i'm proud of since I put a lot of work and effort into getting more muscular. Also, I like how only one of my eyes is shown from behind my hair, it makes the color seem more intense.



**2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

I'd say my pictures show Im just a really lighthearted guy, I enjoy myself, my friends, and family, and I'm always ready to crack a joke or use some sarcastic wit. In a lot of ways my pictures also reflect that I'm strong, in general, physically, and in the face of adversity

**Fig. 47. 19 year-old male**

**3).What do you think most women look for in men's profiles on MySpace?**

Body, I've noticed that more women cruise spaces of guys who have any part of their body other than what's standard unveiled, they also look a lot at a guys views, and if

posted, their opinions on women. It's natural for one sex to be curious and even demanding in regards to what a member of the opposite sex thinks, says, or does.

**4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture?**

Money, power, intelligence, and it never hurts to have good looks or charm, I feel that what makes men successful in contemporary American culture reflects exactly how shallow our culture really is. More insight as to men's poeticism, philosophical thoughts or progressions, and kindness should be more influential, the stereotypes flung every which way about men, and women for that matter seem to almost make just co-gender interactions themselves awkward, uncomfortable, or hurtful. It would help if everyone could be more open, about themselves, their gender, and their sexuality if I were to be so bold.

**5). What do you think makes men seem successful in women's eyes?**

I haven't put a lot of thought into that... I know a lot of what is attractive in women's eyes, but I would hate to be a hypocrite and throw out the stereotypical viewpoint. Cars, money, good looks, but I believe that those truly are just physically tangible forms of success, the ones that can be immediately noticed, I'm fairly certain that most woman would consider a man whom they knew a little better, who possessed the qualities of kindheartedness, chivalry, and class, would be considered highly successful.

Though the above respondent is replying to the survey with the alternate question five, his answers share commonalities with the answers from the 20 year-old male quoted on page 69. Both men describe what they perceive as the “shallowness” of American culture, as well as certain stereotypes they consider a stumbling block to successful interaction between the sexes. The above respondent also shares his observation that women seem to view the MySpace pages of men who choose to unveil more than what is “standard.” Yet, he also refers to “MySpace whores” who consciously choose such to create and post such photos, much like the 27 year-old male above who mentions “six pack in the bathroom mirror douchebag shots.” Both men are aware of the conventions employed in the photos of other men on MySpace, but both also acknowledge that they chose their photos because they believe they reveal their bodies in an appealing way.

Common themes are also present in the remainder of respondents who received the standard survey questions. Their answers are catalogued in the appendix. Though the two respondents above mention status indicators facetiously, many respondents list similar answers for question number three in a manner that implies they are not facetious. The respondents of surveys one, two, three, six, and eight state that they believe women want to see indicators of stability and personal responsibility (e.g. “being a good provider”) and economic prosperity, as well as physically attractive characteristics. The respondent in survey number four suggests that what women want to see from men is dependent on their motives for seeking a relationship. He suggests that women who are interested in a purely sexual relationship want to see indicators of physical attractiveness, but that women who are interested in a long-term relationship look for indicators of responsibility and economic stability.

Acknowledging that women might have different motives for seeking relationships most likely has a significant effect on the way some men choose to display themselves. Though the respondent in survey number four certainly does not speak for all men on MySpace, he is likely not alone in his awareness that some women are looking for a purely sexual relationship. If the men who display themselves in the manner illustrated in this chapter are also interested in a purely sexual relationship, it is possible that the photos they select are geared towards women seeking the same. If the primary goal is attracting women interested only in a sexual relationship, providing information related to other indicators of status is unnecessary and possibly even counterproductive; providing an illustration of physical attributes and sexual prowess, however, is essential.



### Below the Belt: The “Other” Category of Photos

In addition to the conventions displayed in the photos of this chapter, I consistently encountered another category of photos posted on MySpace when I began this research: the “crotch shot.” Increased monitoring of inappropriate content has, as previously noted, eliminated many images such as those in fig. 46-48. However, it is important to note again that members can make their photo indices private, allowing only individuals on their friends list to view such images and report them as inappropriate content. Although MySpace personnel have access to all material posted by members, the site is not responsible for content as stated in the “Terms of Service” below:

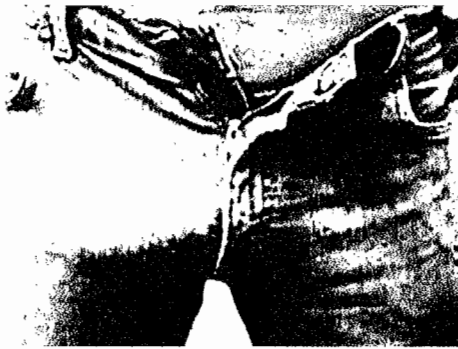
7.1 MySpace may reject, refuse to post or delete any Content for any or no reason, including Content that in the sole judgment of MySpace violates this Agreement or which may be offensive, illegal or violate the rights of any person or entity, or harm or threaten the safety of any person or entity. MySpace assumes no responsibility for monitoring the MySpace Services for inappropriate Content or conduct. If at any time MySpace chooses, in its sole discretion, to monitor the MySpace Services, MySpace nonetheless assumes no responsibility for the Content, no obligation to modify or remove any inappropriate Content, and no responsibility for the conduct of the User submitting any such Content.

7.2 You are solely responsible for the Content that you post on or through any of the MySpace Services, and any material or information that you transmit to other Members and for your interactions with other Users.<sup>10</sup>

Making photos viewable only to friends rather than all MySpace members helps to substantially reduce the chance of being “caught” for posting inappropriate content.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=misc.privacy>



**Fig. 48. 25 year-old male**



**Fig. 49. 25 year-old male**



**Fig. 50. 23 year-old male**

The focus on male genitalia in the photos above is in sharp contrast to the absent genitalia of Thomas' male cemetery statuary, mass-produced toys, and action figures (Thomas, 2003). Crotch shots I encountered almost always featured the penis at least partially erect, and often included captions written by the member confirming both the validity of the photo and the ability of the subject to sexually fulfill his partner. Unlike the semi-nude photos I encountered, crotch shots were almost never chosen as the primary photo, necessitating membership in order to view them in the photo index. Not only does this focus on male genitalia contrast with cemetery statuary, but also with the conventions for depicting nude males in ancient Greek art discussed in the previous

chapter. In contemporary American culture, the penis has become equated with status, and the larger the better. Susan Bordo describes the distinction between penis as bodily organ, and phallus as instrument of power:

As this happened, it became harder for the explicit depiction of the large, erect penis to serve as a symbol of anything divine or worthy of reverence. Instead, it became relegated to the symbolization of excessive, 'animal' instincts (on satyrs, for example, as noted earlier), while the worship of the male principle became more abstract and its old, explicit penile reference more obscure...Not surprisingly, the penis began to be seen as an object of shame, a rebellious little piece of flesh that kept pursuing the body's irrational desires. (Bordo 1999, 91)

It would be difficult to argue that men such as those in fig. 46-48 are displaying anything other than their penises. Though these men may be interested in conveying power, it is the specifically tactile power of sexual potency. Bordo describes the penis' "unique ability to make erotic feeling visible and apparent to the other person, a transparency of response that can be profoundly sexually empowering to the one who has stirred the response" (Bordo 1999, 65-66).

John Berger argues that the way in which men and women perceive the world is different, as is the way they view objects and individuals. Such a difference also affects the way in which men present themselves to an observer. In an analysis of several centuries' worth of art, Berger compares the way in which female and male nudes in European art are depicted:

According to usages and conventions which are at last being questioned but have by no means been overcome, the social presence of a woman is different in kind from that of a man. A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies...A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. (Berger 1977, 45)

Berger notes that in the majority of nudes, the female appears in a way which suggests she is conscious of the observer. In her acknowledgement of the observer, she is not naked as she is--she is naked as the spectator sees her (Berger 1977, 50). In the photographs on MySpace, the “promise of power” is certainly evident in both the display of muscles and erect genitalia. The element that differs is the acknowledgement of an observer, made impossible by the elimination of the face in many photos.

In the nudes Berger studied, he noted perhaps a hundred exceptions to the presentation of female nudity for a spectator. He calls the subjects of such paintings “loved women” (Berger 1977, 57). These women are featured naked, but they are not returning the gaze of the spectator. They are engaged elsewhere, often looking at a subject off-canvas. Observers cannot persuade themselves that these women appear naked for them, and must acknowledge that they are outsiders witnessing the women’s own will and intentions expressed by the way in which the artist has chosen to render them (Berger 1977, 57). It is entirely possible that the men who chose to feature themselves nude or partially nude and faceless are exerting their will by eliminating the element of passivity in acknowledging a spectator’s gaze. They may be appearing naked or with partially exposed genitals, but they are retaining the element of power described by Berger above. They are featuring themselves in a way that suggests what they can do to or for a potential mate, but not in a way that suggests what can be done to them as passive recipients.

Berger’s analysis also seems consistent with recent scientific research. Bordo quotes science writer Deborah Blum, who cites a report from the Kinsey Institute of a

study suggesting that more than four times as many men than women became erotically aroused when shown images of nude males and females.<sup>11</sup> However, Bordo is skeptical of claims suggesting that such differences are innate. She writes,

Blum presents these findings as suggestive of a hard-wired difference between men and women. I'd be cautious about accepting that conclusion. First of all, there's the question of which physiological responses count as 'erotic arousal' and whether they couldn't be evidence of other states. Clearly, too, we can *learn* to have certain physiological responses—and to suppress them—so nothing biologically definitive is proved by the presence or absence of physical arousal. (Bordo 1999, 177)

Bordo has good reason to be skeptical of the claim that women are simply not wired for visual stimulation. In "Pornography in Small Places and Other Spaces," Katrien Jacobs argues that, although the largest players in the online porn industry are businesses with tremendous capital, the draw of amateur websites is substantial. Jacobs cites Frederick Lane's description of the rise in amateur pornographic websites, which draw a large audience of both sexes:

Admittedly, the established players in the pornography industry have enormous technical, financial, and editorial resources (. . .) But amateur Web site operators have their own enormous draw: the very realness of the images they offer and the inherent voyeurism of looking at them. (Jacobs 2004, 68)

The very "real" images of men are presented on MySpace for potentially all to view, and blatantly sexual images such as the erect penises featured above certainly anticipate voyeurism. Men who post images such as these either reject the notion that women do not

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<sup>11</sup> "Fifty-four percent of the men were erotically aroused versus 12 percent of the women—in other words, more than four times as many men. The same gap exists, on a much larger scale, in the business of pornography, a \$500-million plus industry in the U.S. which cater almost exclusively to men. In the first flush of 1970s feminism, two magazines—*Playgirl* and *Viva*—began publishing male centerfolds. *Viva* dropped the nude photos after surveys showed their readers didn't care for them; the editor herself admitted to finding them slightly disgusting." (Bordo 1999, 177)

respond favorably to visual stimuli, or have a different motive altogether for displaying erotic images. Though context may clearly indicate that some photos, such as figures 39 and 40, are not meant to be received erotically even though the men in them are partially undressed, the images of erect or partially erect penises can be interpreted as nothing other than an advertisement of sexual potency. The intended audience for such an advertisement may be both male and female regardless of the sexual orientation of the men who post these images; they may be interpreted as both a competitive display of superior genitals aimed at other males, and a “come-on” to potential female sexual partners.

If the penis is yet another status indicator of the type Baym describes, photos such as those above are ideal for a venue like MySpace where one image is worth much more in terms of “authenticity” than written boasts and descriptions of sexual potency. None of the men who replied to my survey mentioned penis size in their replies, with one exception. One respondent mentions genitalia in his answers, but he makes it clear he does so jokingly. In his response to question three, “What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace”, he answers, “their penis \*snicker\* no, I don't know ummm attractive muscular men doing manly things \*laughing\* I don't know.”<sup>12</sup> This particular respondent seems to find the idea that women want to see men's penises both humorous and absurd. A number of factors could be responsible for men not mentioning penis size in their answers. They may have felt such an answer was inappropriate regardless of whether or not it was true, or in light of the new “report content” measures,

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<sup>12</sup> See page 101 of the Appendix for this respondent's complete survey answers.

they may have felt it unwise to discuss restricted photos. In addition, since I distributed the survey randomly, I was not on the “friends list” of any of the men who responded and could not have accessed photos restricted to viewing by “friends only,” leaving me unable to verify any mentions made of them.

### Conclusion

When Jon Katz wrote “Birth of a Digital Nation” in 1997, questions concerning the demographics represented by the cyber community had yet to be answered:

I came across questions, some tenuously posed: Are we living in the middle of a great revolution, or are we just members of another arrogant élite talking to ourselves? Are we a powerful new kind of community or just a mass of people hooked up to machines? Do we share goals and ideals, or are we just another hot market ready for exploitation by America's ravenous corporations? (Katz, 1997)

Now, more than a decade after Katz’s article, accessing the internet is as easy as walking into a cyber café, and computers themselves have become relatively affordable for many budgets. Extra hardware such as the more basic models of webcams can be purchased for as little as \$25. The question of whether the cyber community is composed of an “arrogant elite” is settled. A computer and a camera (or even a friend’s camera) is all that is necessary to create an image of a body and post it on the web; in other words, almost anyone can do it, unlike vase painting in ancient Greece. Vase painting was an art, and though the product was produced on a large scale and widely accessible to the general public, only those trained in the art itself could produce it. As previously mentioned, the bodies featured in vase painting were representations of the ideal male form, not of specific individuals, and followed conventions and aesthetic principles similar to those

governing high art. Given this distinction between vase painting and photos of men on the internet, it is striking that so many men who are featuring themselves as individuals and selecting photos to display their own bodies would so closely conform to a set of aesthetic principles evident in the photos of Chapter III.

Many ancient Greeks considered powerfully muscular, athletic bodies aesthetically pleasing attributes for males to display, as do many contemporary Americans, as the images on the vases featured in Chapter II clearly indicate. However, because the roles of pursuer and pursued were both occupied by men in ancient Greece, and because moderation and prudence with regard to sexual appetite were held in high social regard, the manner in which the genitals are displayed differ tremendously. The nature of homosexual relationships between men in ancient Greece also dictates the significance of age in artistic representations of men engaged in sexual acts, as previously discussed. The uniformly youthful appearance of male models in contemporary advertising and the mass-media further serves as an indicator of virility and sexual potency, and accounts for the low number of images featuring men and women over the age of thirty-five. Dedication to rendering the ideal human form, male or female, is an important characteristic of Greek art from the Archaic and Classical Periods. Though theories concerning underlying influences and cultural circumstances are necessary for understanding any work of art, they should not ultimately detract from the ability to recognize the central aim of a genre which, in the case of Athenian art, is the perfect, harmonious proportion of the human body so well conveyed by the *Doryphoros* and



Polykleitos' entire prescription for the *Canon*.<sup>13</sup> Temptation to impose modern ideology upon the ancient world is virtually impossible to avoid given our cultural and temporal distance from it. We can be certain that ancient Athens was a patriarchal society. We can also be certain that male homosexuality was not only permissible (at least for the leisure class) but also granted a position of privilege in many ancient texts, and that these factors certainly influenced the commissioning and production of art in the Archaic and Classical Periods.

Age is considered a detracting factor from sexual potency in American culture rather than an indicator of the ability to appropriately reciprocate sexual favors with intellectual ones. However, in present-day heterosexual relations in America, though age does not convey sexual potency, age can in many cases convey the ability to provide financial favors in exchange for sexual ones. Dominant aesthetic representations of males in erotic vase paintings are consistent with the social norms of ancient Greece, just as representations of men in mass media and advertising are indicative of the cultural norms of contemporary American society. The norms for acceptable sexual conduct and preference for heterosexual relations in American culture have a significant impact on images circulated through mass media and directly coincide with the acknowledgement of the female gaze by advertisers. No direct correlation exists between appropriate sexual conduct between males in ancient Greece and contemporary American society. As stated

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<sup>13</sup> From Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, 5: [Beauty arises from] the commensurability [*symmetria*] of the parts, such as that of finger to finger, and all of the fingers to the palm and wrist, and of these to the forearm, and of the forearm to the upper arm, and, in fact, or everything to everything else, just as it is written the *Canon* of Polykleitos....Polykleitos supported his treatise [by making] a stature according to the tenets of his treatise, and called the statue, like the work, the *Canon*. (Gardner's *Art through the Ages*, 2006, 119)

in Chapter III, although women now enjoy more of the rights and status of their male counterparts, heterosexual roles still largely ascribe men the role of the pursuer and women the role of the pursued. The quid pro quo relationship between two free-born Greek males who engaged in sexual conduct is not applicable to heterosexual relationships in American culture due to discrepancies in status still present between American men and women. Free-born male citizens of Athens under the new democracy were considered equal in all respects. Opportunities for amassing wealth, education, and civic participation were all aspects of citizenship awarded exclusively to free-born men, and denied to women, aliens, and slaves.

In the present day U.S., though women enjoy so many freedoms denied to their ancient Greek counterparts, the battle for equal rights still continues on many fronts. In the economic sphere for example, women's earning power still remains below that of men.<sup>14</sup> Free-born males of Athens only fought for social equality against oligarchs and tyrants who were also free-born Athenian men, and all were granted the exclusive privileges of the male birthright. Many depictions of men in advertising and the mass-media still capitalize on the notion that men naturally hold the greater share of power to act, and perhaps most importantly, to pursue and conquer. Although open acknowledgement that women want to be sexually satisfied is a fairly recent development in advertising, and the images of men selected by advertisers are intended to capitalize upon this now socially acceptable fact, men are still commonly portrayed as the sexual

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<sup>14</sup> See online article "Research Examines Why Women Earn Less Than Men", April 9, 2007, Vanderbilt University Law School for table of US Census Bureau Earnings in 2002 (<http://law.vanderbilt.edu/article-search/article-detail/index.aspx?nid=101>).

aggressor, the pursuer. Therefore, it is no surprise that men whose physical attributes suggest they are successful in this capacity are featured in advertising and the mass media.

As discussed in the beginning of Chapter III, the reasons I chose to focus on American heterosexual males include a growing trend of body dysmorphia among both sexes and a perceived increase in pressure from advertisers and the media to have the “perfect” body. I found that many of the men whose pages I examined do feature their bodies in a way similar to advertisements using male models as illustrated by their photos. However, the majority of the survey answers suggest that, while men believe their physical attributes are significant to women, they often consider other indicators of status and success more important. But men who choose their bodies as the primary means of communicating what they have to offer to women have, in effect, leveled the playing field by advertising what the media promises all men can achieve: an ideal body. In an environment saturated with visual media, if the primary objective is to enjoy a sexual liaison, chiseled abs and rippling biceps often speak louder than claims of a six-figure income or textually professed declarations of personal attributes. Such claims require verification, whereas photos serve as hard “proof.” This is not to say that those who post photos are always who they claim to be, but net-savvy individuals are aware of this fact, and requesting a conversation via webcam is often the first and most convenient means of confirming if a user’s physical identity matches that displayed in photos.

In addition to the issues of body dysmorphia and negative self-image, as mentioned in the Introduction, Thomas gives us what is perhaps the most important

reason to be concerned with how popular representations of masculinity influence culture. The criticism of the theory *The Adonis Complex* authors propose for the increase of domestic violence in Chapter III makes it clear that feminism is not the cause of violence against women. Rather, the cultural constructs of masculinity that glorify violence as a masculine virtue are far more likely to blame. As with many features of ancient Greece, lack of proximity makes it impossible to argue with certainty that Greek culture was more or less violent than contemporary American culture. However, the art, literature, and historical texts of the ancient Greeks make it clear that violence certainly played some role, and competition between men as a means of achieving personal excellence (*arête*) was certainly encouraged.<sup>15</sup> The muscled physiques of the *Doryphoros* and the Riace Warriors are not as absurdly hypermasculine as contemporary male action figures. Although the statues no longer hold the weapons they originally bore, their bodies alone retain the power—and threat—of the ideal male form.

The men of MySpace may incorporate into their photos much of the softened, sexualized aspects of masculinity Bordo notes in the Calvin Klein ads, but as Thomas observes, their bodies remain hard, as do those of their male model counterparts:

Even in this advertisement the man is still encased in a well-muscled and powerful physique, a construction of the male form that follows a fine-art tradition designed to avoid a feminized reading of the male figure. Indeed, the body of the model is not the softer, more flowing figure of the fine-art ephebe. The 1995 Calvin Klein image blends and masculinizes two old art traditions. The first is the use of a body (although usually a female one) to represent idealized beauty, and the second is the tradition of using a muscled (armored) male body to communicate power. (Thomas 2003, 185)

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<sup>15</sup> See both Hurwit and Foucault.

The ancient Greeks prided themselves on moderation and self control. The legendary Oracle of Delphi supposedly had the two phrases, “Know thyself” and “Nothing in Excess” carved into the Temple of Apollo (Lamb 1955, ll.164d-165a). They considered their bodies to be physical manifestations of a moderate and self-possessed spirit, and they ridiculed outward indications of excess. The Greek artistic preference for small, flaccid genitalia echoes the theme of moderation, as does reserving images of large and erect penises for depictions of lascivious satyrs. The body was certainly not the last vestige of identity for the men of ancient Greece, nor is it the last vestige of identity for many men in contemporary American culture according to the answers supplied on the survey. The images and text employed by the men of MySpace often convey an awareness of popular conventions concerning bodily forms and aesthetic expressions, but they may also convey what the men themselves are actively seeking.

Some men present themselves as the “total package;” that is, they convey with their photos that they are attractive, but also use text to describe aspects of their individual identities and indicators of status such as education and economic stability. Others present only their bodies for consideration. The respondent on page 76 indicates that he is aware of the possibility of being “sized up” as a potential mate, and although he does not state the he is averse to a serious romantic relationship, he indicates that he is not interested in women who are attracted to him based on anything other than his personality. He states that neither his profile nor his photographs are excessively revealing for this purpose. Men who choose to identify themselves with photos revealing their bodies alone might be sending a clear message of what they are willing to offer a

potential partner: their bodies. Likewise, men who present themselves as the total package may also be sending the message to potential partners that they are interested in more than a purely physical relationship. Regardless of intent, the photos in Chapter III illustrate that many men who display their bodies in photos on MySpace do so according to conventions similar to those found in mass-media and advertising rather than high art. Though many of the men in these photos are certainly muscular, it is not clear whether they are abusing steroids or suffering from “bigorexia” or other forms of body dysmorphia. While the theory that men are left with their bodies as the last available expression of masculine identity may be valid in some contexts, the men whose photos I examined on MySpace expressed the specific goal of seeking a romantic partner. The theory that the way they choose to display their bodies is an indication of whether they are seeking a serious relationship or a purely physical one seems not only more practical, but also more applicable when compared with the texts and survey answers of other men.

## APPENDIX

### ADDITIONAL SURVEYS

#### Survey #1.

24 year-old Male

**1).What made you choose these pictures of yourself?**

I tried to choose pictures that show the many sides of me, to show the things that do that make me feel good, OR just some stuff I think is random and funny.

**2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

That I at least TRY to be involved in a many things, and some personal stuff, and things that I might have thought were odd.

**3).What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace?**

It's hard to generalize. Most women want MANY very different things. Unless they want a typical pressed out delinquent hard body. These women are the minority, but they are easiest generalize. Women, just like all people, want to meet a guy online that fits into their agenda. Whether it be father their children, boost their self esteem, pursue a life a partner, i guess myspace gives people a perspective on who other people are and what they are about.

**4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture?  
What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?**

I suppose in American culture, what makes a man successful is to be dominant, promiscuous, wealthy, confident, with a touch of arrogance and being a bit of an oblivious jack ass. I actually think this is a much easier question for women. Women are always questioning this stuff, men ... we aren't suppose to ask these things, I guess we are supposed to be completely oblivious to it.

**5).What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)?**

Society expects nothing from except to pay the bills ... I think. I don't think society expects us to be happy or sad. We show up, we work, and we pay. We are supposed to be shrewed, a little heartless and not think about these things ....

Survey #2.21 year-old male**1).What made you choose these pictures of yourself?**

I wanted a close detailed picture!

**2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

BIG HEADED...

and Handsome...

**3).What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace?**

Sexy Pictures and Friends

**4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture?**

**What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?**

Graduate College

**5).What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)?**

Not Very Sure!



Survey #3.

24 year-old male

**1).What made you choose these pictures of yourself?**

The most recent ones was because they are more current as opposed to the other ones i posted from two years back was because i felt i looked better

**2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

i'm not photogenic

**3).What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace?**

attractive.

**4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture?**

**What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?**

hmmmm not sure on that one.

**5).What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)?**

To be handsome, have a car, live on their own and be well off in terms of a job.

Survey #4.

23 year-old Male

**1).What made you choose these pictures of yourself?**

I guess I chose it because I thought I looked hot. Am I right?

**2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

I think it shows a bit about who I am and what I'm into.

**3).What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace?**

It depends on what the woman is looking for. If she's just screwing around she would want a good looking guy. If she's looking for a relationship I guess she would be looking at interests to see what we have in common. I don't know...I'm not a woman.

**4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture?  
What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?**

Again, that depends on what he wants to succeed at. But, I suppose integrity is important in all areas.

**5).What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)?**

I think that more is expected of us now than in previous years.

Survey #5.

30 year-old male

**1).What made you choose these pictures of yourself?**

Pretty much all of the pictures I have represent who and what I am. Both professionally & personally.

**2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

I hope that people find me interesting, attractive, unique and someone they would like to get to know better.

**3).What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace?**

Respect, kindness & politeness.

**4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture?  
What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?**

That's a tough one. Are cultureal expectations say that a man should be independant, wealthy & strong.

I think that if a man has family, good friends & love that I think is success.

**5).What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)?**

I would say the expectations are pretty much described as in the last question.

Survey #6.

25 year-old male

**1).What made you choose these pictures of yourself?**

Only picture i had available to put up, using my cell phone of course.

**2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

Not a whole hell of a lot. Its say this is me, take me as i am...or it says I dont take too many photos nor do my friends to fill up myspace with

**3).What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace?**

Most probably wanna "see" a handsome, strong physically, w/ a good career, man of your dreams-type...

**4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture?  
What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?**

same as always, great education is most important, but good health and confidence are a close behind. Also I'll add knowing more people in life will definitely benefit you if you keep those ties w/ friends throught the years

**5).What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)?**

sorry could come up w/ anything...hopefully "society" is expecting the same for everyone else

Survey #7.18 year-old male**1).What made you choose these pictures of yourself?**

Popular demand. I had them up in my photo gallery and all the girls said to use this one or that for whatever, so I did.

**2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

Nothing other than I play music I'd say. But what I think and what others do rarely is the same.

**3).What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace?**

Don't know. It never was an issue for me. I think it depends on the girl too.

**4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture? What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?**

Well, I think the general perception of success is money and power. If you have those you're successful. Anything you did to get them is what made you successful. I don't follow those values, however. If I'm happy and have no regrets about where I am and what I'm doing I'm successful.

**5).What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)?**

Everything. Good-looks, kind, rich, smart, ethnical, sexual, romantic, understanding, firm, observant, interesting, available, open, sensitive, in shape, ect. We're kinda screwed.

Survey #8.28 year-old male**1).What made you choose these pictures of yourself?**

My current main pic is of a cartoon character from the japanese anime show Naruto. His name is Rock Lee (a not-so-subtle homage to Bruce Lee). He's sort of this bad ass fighter who got to be one of the best by never giving up even though he was told by the entire world that he was a talentless loser. I would imagine that tells you something.

Most of the other pics that I've used for my avatar were pics of me wearing my cowboy hat or in a suit. Both types of pictures speak to a very strong aspect of who I am. The former, that I am proud of my redneck heritage. The latter, that I am an educated, well rounded man with a great sense of style and confidence. Both are just there to help attract women.

**2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

Different things, depends on the pic. They all reflect aspects of me. Rock n' Roll. Good ol boy. Scifi geek. Disney nut. Noir.

**3).What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace?**

I suppose intrigue, mystery... basically the classic definition of romance.

**4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture?**

**What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?**

Money. It defines us socially. Personally, I feel success, is finding love and a family, and a job you enjoy.

**5).What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)?**

Strength, control, power

Survey # 9.29 year-old male**1).What made you choose these pictures of yourself?**

Uhhh.... my dashing, debonair good looks.

**2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

family guy but also fucking hot

**3). What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace?**

their penis \*snicker\* no, I don't know ummm attractive muscular men doing manly things \*laughing\* I don't know

**4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture?**

**What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?**

lots of money, trying to be the best, raise good kids, and then die \*grin\*

**5).What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)?**

make more money

be a provider

Survey #10.

28 year-old male

**1).What made you choose these pictures of yourself?**

Strictly vanity. Even as I get older and more fat, I still think I look pretty good. I also think I have a friendly face, a trusting face. I want new people to feel welcome talking to me. Thusly, I pick pictures where I feel I look good.

**2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

I guess I inadvertently answered this already: kind, trustworthy, charming as hell.

**3).What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace?**

Do people fish for mates on here? I better get with it. I didn't think people were that dumb. I would guess what they want in every day reality: A genuine personality, kindness, a sense of humor, passion, humility. Probably a lot more than you can convey with pixels on a screen.

**4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture?  
What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?**

I think what makes any person, not just a man, successful is their own view on their life. If they are truly happy with what they have accomplished and where they are at financially, spiritually, emotionally, etcetera, then, in my view, they are successful. Success, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

**5).What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)?**

More than most are capable of.



Survey #11.

30 year-old male

**1).What made you choose these pictures of yourself?**

They're the only pictures I have of myself. They kind of describe my variety of poles. One set is me playing with my phone. Another set is of me in a costume with a giant cock on my head. Also there are some of me in a tux because I think I look good.

**2).What do you feel your pictures say about you?**

That I'm serious silly and I look good in the morning.

**3).What do you think women most want to see from men on MySpace?**

A spectrum of personality. Most likely not crude. Think commercial art people. Presentation is to highlight your good points. Women want to see faults too. If you admit your faults then she doesn't have to ask. I think women are looking for a more personal thing than sexy bodies and pecs. My myspace page is just silly. Full of anime and very childish.

**4).What do you think makes a man successful in contemporary American culture? What kind of things should a man have accomplished in his life in order to be considered successful?**

Enjoying what they do as a profession. That is my definition of success.

**5).What do you feel society expects from men in the present (2008)?**

Sadly not as much as it should. Self sufficiency and honoring one's word are the only two universal expectancies of men.

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